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CHARLES READE, D.C.L.

A MEMOIR



CHARLES READE

DRAMATIST, NOVELIST, JOURNALIST

A Memoir

COMPILED CHIEFLY FROM HIS LITERARY REMAINS

By CHARLES L. READE

AND

THE REV. COMPTON READE

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II.

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CONTENTS OF VOLUME II.

CHAP.	PAGE
I. READE & BENTLEY ...	I
II. VICTORY! ...	21
III. A VINDICATION OF SHAKESPEARE ...	40
IV. VISITS TO ADDINGTON AND KNEBWORTH ...	64
V. COMBATIVE ...	78
VI. THE CLOISTER AND THE HEARTH ...	98
VII. HARD CASH ...	128
VIII. THE DRAMA 'SERA NUNQUAM' ...	155
IX. THREE NOVELS AND THREE PLAYS ...	179
X. IDEAL JOURNALISM ...	208
XI. WISDOM AND FOLLY ...	230
XII. FRIENDS, FAULTORS, AND FAVOURITES ...	257
XIII. DEAD-SEA FRUIT ...	308
XIV. VIA CALCANDA ...	337
APPENDIX ...	357



A MEMOIR
OF
CHARLES READE, D.C.L.,
DRAMATIST, NOVELIST, JOURNALIST.

CHAPTER I.

READE *v.* BENTLEY.

HIS reference to Mr. Bentley has something in it almost pathetic. When, in obedience to the dictates of common sense, he decided to convert into a novel his magnificent drama 'Masks and Faces,' the first fruit, as he deemed it, of his genius, he had been very well pleased to discover in Mr. Bentley a publisher willing to take him by the hand. The book was termed 'Peg Woffington,' and we may safely affirm, without fear of contradiction, that in the English language there exists no work of fiction written so concisely yet with such

graphic force. It would be difficult to discover one word too many; even less easy to suggest how without detriment to the intensity of the interest a line of description could be added. We have already seen, from his own testimony, how he excised not a few of Taylor's picturesque superfluities from the play; nor was he less rigorous with his own copy. One winter's night he sat for several hours in the rooms in Magdalen of Dr. Harris Smith, younger brother of Canon Bernard Smith—number eight, Cloisters, first pair left—and pen in hand essayed an epilogue to that play. At the moment he was pleased with his—shall we call it, doggrel? He read it and re-read it to the writer of these lines, requesting him to suggest something more euphonious for the concluding couplet, a task to which the brain of the said nephew, then but a schoolboy, was by no means equal. At the risk of raising a smile we recall this moribund epilogue. It ran thus:

A hundred years have passed away
Since all these leaves fell from the tree.
The tree still blows as green as ever,
For artists perish, art dies never.
Cibber, and Woffington, and I,

Live but to make you laugh, and cry ;
 And show you still, that here's the will,
 The warm desire to please ye,
 And find a way to make you stay
 An hour with Fan or Peggy !

First impressions, however, never left a lasting mark on an author whose powers of self-criticism and self-revision were unbounded, always premising that he was not hurried prematurely *in celeres iambos*, or any other form of printer's ink. Hence, out went these lines, together with some of the Taylorian embellishments, and 'Masks and Faces' remains an eternal monument to the fidelity to art of honest authorship.

He preferred 'Masks and Faces' to 'Peg Woffington,' and in his inmost heart felt, as a matter of preference, that "the play's the thing!" Yet he had no cause to complain of the reception of his first literary essay. 'The Times' led the way with a strong encomium; the reviews followed suite. Certainly Oxford was beyond measure delighted. The only grumble was, that he had not made 'Peg Woffington' sufficiently Irish—indeed, it was privately hinted that he might recast the character on the lines of Lever with advantage.

That, however, was hyper-criticism. He introduced 'Peg' as a leading lady on the London stage, not as a savage Irishwoman from Kerry; and he could hardly have been far wrong in his presumption that she had learned the English language. Indeed, whether we regard this same conception as a drama, or as dramatic narration, we are lost in admiration of its gorgeous literary quality. Its author from first to last was jealous for its honour. For example, writing some years later from the Garrick Club to Mrs. Seymour at Brighton, he says, "You are right, I think, to play 'Masks and Faces' with Mrs. Wyndham and Toole. Tell me how you get on with it; and mind, nothing must be left to chance with respect to the picture. Talk to Toole. Show him in what state he is to take it on. And explain to him that he must not really strike it in the Third Act."

Again, in a letter to Mrs. Seymour from Paris, of the date probably 1852—53 (he *never* dated a letter), we find this reference to, apparently, the play, though he gives it the title of the novel.

*Hôtel National,
Rue Notre Dame des Victoires, Paris.*

"You may imagine with what pleasure I saw your well-known hand.

"Heaven forbid that the fate of the leaf should be yours!

"See how dangerous are similes. You almost deserve that I should remind you, that you are not the leaf, but the plant, which is not injured, happily, because it sacrifices a leaf to healing purposes.

"I am not in very good spirits about business. — has already brought out a play called '*Les chercheurs d'or*'; and of course this is an almost invincible obstacle to me.

"The theatres are very uninteresting. The weather is most oppressive to the spirits, so, as usual, *je suis triste*.

"We have translated the First Act of 'Peg Woffington,' and it looks well in French. My translator, who is a dramatic author, is satisfied with the First Act; and the action of the other two is quite as rapid, so I hope we shall do."

These brief excerpts will give an idea of how intensely his mind was wrapped up in

‘Peg,’—call it drama, or call it novel, even while he was engaged on ‘Gold.’ Never was a theme subjected to more careful, more loving, elaboration.

‘Peg Woffington,’ the novel, saw the light in the summer of 1853, the last year of the venerable George Stanley Faber’s life. That able theologian, in the recesses of his study at Sherburn Hospital, read the book between 5 a.m., his invariable hour for rising, and 8.30, the family breakfast hour, and was simply entranced by his nephew’s achievement. Strange to relate, he handed it to a rather clever Irish lady, his guest at the time, who in turn at dinner pronounced it to be “quite passable, but devoid of imagination,”—*quot feminae tot sententiæ!* This was not the universal verdict of the sex. Mrs. Reade, for example, doffed her puritanism for the occasion, vowed that her Charles had done himself credit, but sent him with this warm meed of praise a loving hint, that his mother hoped he would never write a word he need afterwards feel ashamed of. Perhaps we may hazard the assertion, that the book did as well as the play. The latter, except in one particular, fared

better subsequently under the stage-management of Mrs. Bancroft. The former was the tentative effort of an unknown man. That alone will account for the sum handed to him by his publisher, on the half-profit system, reaching only the modest total of £30.

To say that the author was discouraged is to reveal an open secret. Still the reviews had spoken words of strong praise. He felt inspired to try again.

'Christie Johnstone' differs from 'Peg Woffington' in being less concisely dramatic, and more descriptive. It is a beautiful, because an ideal, story, and the plaudits of the press grew in volume and intensity. Here again, notwithstanding, the reading public only displayed a mild avidity, and the author netted another miserable £30. This was indeed a sorry victory. He had evidently failed to command the popular ear, and his robust intellect did not omit to read the lesson of this *succès d'estime*. He perceived that he must paint on a bigger canvas, and colour with varied and absorbing human interests. A weaker mind would have been dashed, and given up. His was spurred onwards to grander

and more laborious exertions. He never lost faith in his *children*, as he fondly styled the products of his brain. Nor, as regards these two, was his paternal affection misplaced. 'Peg' must be perennial. She has as much life in her as Lady Teazle. The character of Triplet alone would suffice to render either the novel or the play coeval with the English language. 'Christie Johnstone,' odd, epigrammatic, and angular as it may be termed, coruscates with a glorious tenderness, and when its author for once forgets to be terse, and launches into description, he gives us in the Rescue-scene one of the most vivid of word-pictures ever penned. He was right to love these two novels—blest pair of syrens—the efflux of his earlier genius. The irony of fate decreed, that just as he had to battle for his Fellowship, which was his own, so also for the copyrights of these novels.

The following is his own version of the struggle, which at the time affected him profoundly—we might almost say morbidly, for his fury against Messrs. Bentley was evanescent, and after his dearly bought victory entirely ceased. Perhaps it might be affirmed with

truth that soon after the hatchet was buried the old sentiment of friendship revived. Certain it is, that both the Bentleys, father and son, *malgré* their defeat, entertained towards their antagonist feelings of the most chivalrous character. They fought him for what they imagined—as it proved erroneously—to be their legal rights. They lost, and they lost with a good grace. It is gratifying to reflect that his last, as well as his first, novel, was issued by that eminent, liberal, and honourable firm.

“I produced,” he writes, “two novels in one vol. each, ‘Peg Woffington,’ ‘Christie Johnstone.’

“These were published on what is called the half-profit system.

“Under this system, which encouraged many frauds, I received for those two successful works only £60—for the two.

“My publisher endeavoured to seize on the copyright, which the agreement did not justify.

“I took proceedings and was defeated by a technicality.

“Costs £120. Publisher persisted. Reade went at him again, employed no counsel *this*

time, and was victorious. But the judge, with manifest partiality, refused him costs.

“These came to £90.

“Receipts for two brilliant works, £60.

Spent in protecting them from fraudulent appropriation, £220.

Punishment for producing ‘Christie Johnstone’ and ‘Peg Woffington,’ £160.”

(N.B. The funny part of this is, that in his righteous indignation his arithmetic got hopelessly mixed; on his own showing his total costs were £210, his total receipts £60. His penalty therefore was £150.)

Then follows a dismal groan.

“After Reade had defeated this publisher, the other publishers held aloof from him. For years he could find no publisher, and was obliged to publish on commission. The weekly papers, being all under trade influence, persistently decried his works, and insulted him. But he went doggedly on, publishing his own works in vol. form, and learning their commercial value.”

Mr. George Bentley, and the Publishing Trade generally, will, we trust, pardon this inclusion of a characteristic memorandum.

Into the merits of our author's quarrel with the publishers it would be superfluous to enter, if indeed such a quarrel existed outside the region of his sensitive imagination. That he benefited is most improbable. Mrs. Seymour gave him practical assistance of a very valuable kind, but he belonged to the class of penny-wise gentry, who leave the pounds to shift for themselves; and it is a fact, that he omitted to square accounts with the late Mr. Trübner for so many years, that his claim was actually statute-run. Fortunately for him, he had to deal with a man of scrupulous integrity, and thus obtained his own. But it is none the less true, that he was totally unconscious of Trübner being in his debt, just as sometimes he would forget for twelve or eighteen months to draw the cheque for his Fellowship from the Bursar of Magdalen.

From a business point of view, nevertheless, he was fully justified in rescuing his copyrights from Messrs. Bentley. At present these books are a genuine literary property, and have a steady sale. In short, if at the moment penalised to the extent of £150, and put to the excitement and trouble of two

lawsuits, he amply recouped himself. Moreover, his victory was a memorable one, since, whereas in the first action, which failed, he employed as his counsel, Mr., afterwards Mr. Justice, Lush, a lawyer second only to Cockburn, who nevertheless broke down, in the second action he trusted solely to the forensic genius of Charles Reade, barrister at law of Lincoln's Inn, who never before had held a brief, but who none the less triumphed where Lush had failed.

Simultaneously with the publication of 'Christie Johnstone' he sat down and wrote a critique of the book. He styles it in his MS.

'CHRISTIE JOHNSTONE,

AN

AUTO-CRITICISM.'

Needless perhaps to add, it was simply a *jeu d'esprit*, never intended, or offered, for publication, being indeed simply the author's candid notion of what an honest critic would say, were he disposed to avoid the minimum alike of praise and blame. It runs thus:

CHRISTIE JOHNSTONE.

A DRAMATIC STORY.

“The origin of this title appears to be the quantity of pure dialogue in the work.

“To those effects in which the drama shines the volume before us makes less pretension than three novels out of four.

“We encourage this author to try again; but must tell him he has much to learn before he can hope to shine in this sort of Fiction.

“To write a good novel, a supple and changeable style is required; but above all, some warmth of imagination: this it is which clothes incidents with those glowing details that make them vivid and interesting.

“The author of ‘Christie Johnstone’ is full of details,—but they are barren details. He deals in those minutiae which are valuable according to the hand that mixes them; but he has not the art of mixing his materials. Hence the compound, with some exceptions, is dry and lumpy.

“This is to be the more regretted as the materials are in themselves decidedly good.

"We have in this country some dozen Ladies and Gentlemen who have long ago written themselves dry; but any one of whom would have made a charming story with Mr. Reade's ideas.

"The Plot, which is of that arbitrary kind that befits a Play rather than a Story, can be disposed of in few words:

"Like all weak Plots it runs in two channels, which are more independent than in rightly constructed Fiction, whether Story or Play.

"A young, rich, handsome, clever Lord is ill and unhappy. He suspects as the cause Lady Barbara Sinclair's cruelty; but Saunders, his factotum, suspects his Lord's liver, and calls in Dr. Aberford, who defying drugs treats him as St. Luke might, and recommends him to make acquaintance with the lower orders, to hear and relieve their more substantial sorrows, to feel for them, and work like them. Off goes my Lord to Newhaven, and goes in for charity and perspiration. There Saunders, sent to catch lower orders, secures two beautiful young Fishwives.

"One of these, Christie Johnstone, catechises our Viscount, and draws out his spark of

enthusiasm, whose existence neither he nor Saunders suspected.

"She then puts him on the road of charity; he learns his first lesson about real afflictions from a Fish-widow, and this scene, showing the Man of Society, whose heart is in him but asleep, with the woman of flesh and blood and sorrows, is well written, though exaggerated.

"In the course of time Lord Ipsden, after a long and fruitless search for adventures, heads a party of fishermen and relieves a distressed vessel in a gale of wind.

"But in the mean time he has fallen in with his cousin Lady Barbara, and revived his hopes. These hopes soon lead to mortification; for the lady, a pupil of Mr. T. Carlyle, has discovered a male pupil, and this pair run down the age together: and Lord Ipsden, whom she has always considered a mere saunterer, finds himself *de trop*. So he demolishes the earnest man in argument, and finds himself still more *de trop*.

"He quits her for a week; but meeting her accidentally on Leith sands, is received graciously. She tells him laughingly that the

earnest man has received his *congé* for running faster than herself from a bull; and bursts into rapturous applause of an heroic action she relates, and so embellishes, that his Lordship only just recognizes his own feat. Her enthusiasm and his confusion are interrupted by the sudden arrival of the identical skipper who had been saved. This man pours out his manly gratitude and sheers off. Her Ladyship, a fine, generous creature, though a goose, laughs, cries, makes the *amende*, and the rest may be imagined.

“The other thread of the story is the loves of Christie Johnstone and an enthusiastic young painter of genius. This personage has all the weakness as well as intellect of a great artist. His mother is determined to separate the lovers, and the poor eloquent vacillator is bandied about like a shuttlecock between two or three unintellectual women with more iron wills than he, till we are ready to throw the book at his head, and bid him pass it on to the writer.

“At last Christie Johnstone finds all this out by arriving suddenly on a stormy dialogue between the artist and his mother; and her

pride and delicacy instantly close the discussion and prevent the rupture. She drops the ring of betrothal between the mother and son, and ends the amour by gesture and silence that have something impressive.

"But her spirits and health suffer, and she pines secretly.

"The young artist is about to leave for England, and would fain part friends: but Christie dismisses him with a hauteur which ill represents her real feelings.

"Not long after, all Newhaven is watching a swimmer, who, it appears, is in the habit of going out to the roads and back. One spirit, quicker than the rest, compares the time, the tide, and other circumstances, and doubts the swimmer's safety. This is Christie, who throws off her listlessness, and with her brother darts down to the Pier, and goes out in a boat amidst the jeers of the others: before, however, she has made her first tack, the whole town has come to her opinion, and it is in front of three thousand spectators that she with difficulty and dexterity saves her lover without discovering his identity, which her brother, who hates him, is anxious to conceal from her.

“The feat has been seen by Lord Ipsden and Lady Barbara from the shore: and Mrs. Gatty, the artist’s mother, who had learned in the heat of the business that it was her son, has fainted and been carried to Christie Johnstone’s house.

“Thus a dramatic close is prepared.

“Christie appears on shore, her colour and spirits restored by a brave action; the mother comes from behind one of the groups that were discussing the feat: the boy comes up with his hair dripping, and Christie’s name in his mouth.

“The mother sees him and runs to him.

“Christie runs too, and no longer mistress of herself, in going to fling her arms round him, flings them as it happens round her competitor, Mrs. Gatty.

“The old lady, a mighty stern sort of body, is still a woman: she cannot resist this: her heart speaks louder than her prudence and her years, and she embraces her daughter; a fisherman blubbers, and everybody is happy, not excepting the sour critic—who finds himself at the end of the tale.

“Incidental to the story, is an episode on

a drowned fisherman, and the manner in which the calamity is broken to his wife.

"This is well imagined, but in the telling of it the true oil of fiction is somewhat wanting.

"We have also a description of two contemporaneous picnics on an island. One of them is composed of ladies and gentlemen; the other of fishermen and fishwives. It is covertly and not without plausibility conveyed, that of the two the snobs are the only pretenders to intellect and *savoir vivre* in their amusements.

"In short, this writer has clearly a quick eye for all that is good and clever in the lower classes; we welcome his aid, our own organs of vision having more than once failed to make these discoveries. And we thank him still more for his forbearance; they who hold his sentiment seldom let us go to bed till they have told us that corduroy is virtue, and broad-cloth and soap are vice: and we are in some terror lest through hearing this too often we may end our rational career by believing it.

"The author of 'Christie Johnstone' has

good thoughts which he could clothe with logic, but he cannot yet dress them in the garb fiction requires. He should associate himself with one of our authoresses : we have several whose abilities are his counterpart. He has plenty to tell us and cannot tell it : they have nothing to say and say it to perfection.

“The pair would produce a novel considerably above the average : something we should read with pleasure and lay aside with delight.”

CHAPTER II.

VICTORY!

WE now come to the supreme crisis in the literary life of Charles Reade—the moment when he awoke to find himself famous.

His quasi-home in Piccadilly had been a chronic source of annoyance in every way. Its nominal tenant was Mr. Samo, Mrs. Seymour's husband, but this individual was perpetually in hot water. Execution succeeded execution, each paid out with greater difficulty than its predecessor; until at last, with the design of securing comparative peace, Charles Reade was induced himself to become tenant of a spacious mansion in Bolton Row. Thither Mrs. Seymour moved her furniture and her lodgers, Captain Curling and Mr. Augustus Braham. It was an eccentric arrangement, but, thanks to a thorough understanding

between all the parties concerned, worked admirably.

As for Samo the impecunious, he discovered a suitable retreat below-stairs. He was now, poor man, no longer in his own house, and therefore at last free from the attentions of bailiffs. He enjoyed both ample provender and peace of mind, and it speaks volumes for the relations subsisting between his wife and her landlord, that he regarded the latter as his true and honest friend, and never evinced a *soupeçon* of jealousy or suspicion.

It was in Bolton Row that Charles Reade completed his *Magnum Opus*. 'Gold' had previously taken fairly with a Drury Lane audience. The critics decried it as a failure, but the length of its run disproved their verdict. It was a thorough success: the Lessee of Drury Lane, in the six weeks' run, netted a clear profit of £1500, and it provided an important element for the great novel.

'It is Never too Late to Mend,' may be said without qualification to have been the keystone of its author's fortune. Up to 1856, when it first saw the light, the public had held its

judgment in suspense. 'Peg Woffington' and 'Christie Johnstone' both paved the way for their splendid successor. They prepared the minds of readers on either side of the Atlantic for the sequel. They had given *éclat* to their author's name, and indeed the public was already on the tiptoe of expectation for his next book. We must bear in mind that novelists of merit at that time of day were but few. Bulwer, Dickens, Samuel Warren, Thackeray, headed the list; and Mrs. Beecher Stowe had proved herself to be a one-book author. Boys read Smedley and Lever; sentimentalists Miss Yonge; whilst Jerrold and Albert Smith had their admirers. But George Eliot and Wilkie Collins, Ouida and Miss Braddon, were as yet unknown, and the libraries had not been surfeited with fiction.

The book appeared. It might be presupposed from its colossal and lasting success that it was welcomed by the critics with a chorus of praise. Not so; criticism in this country has always exhibited the beautiful incertitude of cricket, and so perverted is its judgment, that, not infrequently, a book which is roundly rated has a better chance of gripping the

public than one which is indiscriminately praised.

Nevertheless, the reviews were not all censorious; there were some few honourable exceptions. Here and there might be discovered a pen with sufficient intelligence to appreciate dramatic narration which happened to be dramatic. For example, 'The Critic,' then in the hands of the late Serjeant Cox, a publicist gifted with rare brains and unimpeachable honesty, wrote thus: "*Paulo majora canamus!* Mr. Reade's novel, with the quaint and proverbial title 'It is Never too Late to Mend,' is one of the very few first-rate works of fiction which we have met with in our life. It is a principle-novel, aimed against a system, and that system one of the most crying evils which affect mankind and disgrace humanity; it attacks that code of discipline which converts error into crime, crime into madness; which makes pickpockets burglars, and burglars murderers; which under the pretence of philanthropy inflicts tortures beside which the most cruel refinements of the Inquisition were as gentle mercies; which treats the criminal as a machine to be systematized and not

as a soul to be saved; it is levelled at the solitary, separate, and silent system of treating criminals."

It would constitute a tax on patience were we to give *in extenso* the entirety of this admirable, because just, criticism. We cannot, however, forbear appending its utterances on Mr. Eden, Charles Reade's model parson. "The gaol scenes give occasion for the introduction of a character, which we, without hesitation, pronounce to be one of the very best in the whole range of fiction. This is the chaplain of the gaol, Mr. Eden; a man such as there are, we fear, but few in existence—a man, who, if he lived, would be one of those chosen few, whom the Almighty sends upon the earth to soften the lot of poor, erring, miserable sinners; one of those very few who constitute, as it were, the salt of the human species. It will almost invariably be found, that where the novelist introduces a clergyman upon the scene, he falls either into one or other of two errors: either he represents him in an unfavourable light, as a canting, worldly-minded hypocrite, whose practices are the very reverse of his professions; or else he

makes a saint of him, without one single feature of humanity in him, from the *gloria* round his head, down to the soles of his martyred feet. Now, Mr. Eden is a man—a man of like passions with us all—a man who feels for another, and sympathizes with his weakness because he knows how weak his own heart is.”

In contrast to this straightforward criticism we have the acidulated analysis of ‘The Saturday Review.’ That paper was then at its best. It was launched by Oxford and Cambridge men as a corrective of the Scotticism and Hibernicism of the press; its contributors were scholars and gentlemen, not short-hand writers and penny-a-liners from Edinburgh and Dublin. But in its zeal for thoroughness and accuracy it not infrequently became pedantic, and when it tried to be satirical succeeded only in being insolent. At the same time it must be freely admitted that ‘The Saturday Review’ of 1856 and the succeeding years revived the dormant science of criticism, and dealt a heavy blow to the crass sciolism which then as always infests the London Press. That it fell foul of Charles Reade is hardly

to the credit of its prescience, yet even in its censure it could not without awkwardness conceal an under-current of compulsory admiration.

The following are excerpts from its prolonged half-complimentary snarl: "The plot is full of obvious faults, and the language is disfigured with affectation. It is in every way an uncommon book, uncommon in the power it displays, and the variety of knowledge it contains—uncommon in the beauty and force of its language, when the author forgets to be affected, uncommon in the interest it excites and sustains. The plot, as we have said, is faulty. 'It is Never too Late to Mend' contains in fact three stories; not separated in form, but really quite distinct, and hung together by a very slender thread. The first is a tale of bucolic love; the second is the history of a badly managed gaol; the third relates the adventures of two Australian gold diggers. Each has great merits in itself, but the three do not combine to make a whole. * * * * Every chapter throughout the work is so written that we cannot stop when we have once begun it. * * * * Mr.

Reade makes his miners talk as miners would talk, not like gentlemen and poets in shooting jackets. This seems to be the great gift which Mr. Reade enjoys, he can describe. If he paints a country girl, she is like one, not like a Marchioness with the hat and crook of a shepherdess. His magistrates, navvies, and thieves, move, talk, and behave as we know they ought to. Of imagination in the sense of creation (*sic*) there is not in this book any great trace * * * * but, *it is not once in a year*—or once in five years—that we have a fiction given us so wide in its range, so true to life as this, or containing a character so beautiful as that of Susan Merton."

"Not guilty, but he mustn't do it again;" or perhaps rather "guilty, yet he may do it again," such is the chameleon criticism of this Saturday Reviewer. The man evidently did not know his own mind; he was writhing under a spell and struggling vainly to be free; he meant to curse but drifted off into blessing.

'The Leader,' a paper of some literary pretensions, advocating agnosticism and extreme Radicalism, follows suite, but in a different

vein. "The matter-of-fact romance," it is prepared graciously to admit, "possesses many qualities which will fix the attention of novel readers, and above all it has the quality of readableness." After which piece of platitudinous patronage, it at once darts off into spite. "Without being peculiarly fastidious," it avers, "the reader will be frequently annoyed by certain defects of matter and manner, but even the most fastidious will go through (*sic*) the three volumes, interested, sometimes excited. * * * * Mr. Reade is a playwright rather than a dramatist. He shows us some of the dramatist in 'Susan' and 'George;' but the playwright predominates throughout the volumes. It is seen in the constant and irritating striving for 'effect.' He not only shows us that he is working up to a situation—a tableau on which the curtain may fall—but shows us the puerile efforts at effect in devices of printing, in tirades of rant, in foolish woodcuts meant to be impressive. He can write so simply, and writes so well when he writes simply, that his friends should warn him against unworthy imitations of the inferior French novelists. Short chapters of a few

lines, and paragraphs of a few words, or sentences in capitals, really are not effective, but only show that they were meant to be so. When he does not show us that he is trying to be effective, few writers are more so. When he is not indulging in small affectations, he writes clearly, eloquently, picturesquely. His style is graceful and strong. His power of telling a story, not descriptively but dramatically, is considerable ; and he has a perception of what is healthy in human nature, especially in women. With these qualities we ought to see him produce a novel that would not simply please the unfastidious. 'It is Never too Late to Mend' is such a novel, though not taking a high rank in its class. *No one will re-read it!* The author has bestowed great pains upon it, but he has been less careful with his characters than with his details, and more solicitous of effects than of effect. What are the qualities which made the 'Vicar of Wakefield,' 'Tom Jones,' 'Pride and Prejudice,' 'Ivanhoe,' 'The Scarlet Letter,' works so readable? Not their incidents. Not their 'effects ;' but the quiet stealthy grasp of the imagination and the affections."

The meaning of this farrago seems to be (1) that Goldsmith despised situation, not to say plot. That allegation, *teste* the Lyceum Theatre, is untrue.

(2) That 'Tom Jones' by its stealthy grasp of the affections, beats Charles Reade's *chef d'œuvre*. To which we may reply that the pictures of some among the human affections in the said 'Tom Jones' resemble those of the canine species.

(3) That 'Ivanhoe' and the 'Scarlet Letter' are undramatic. This again is false, albeit both are less dramatic than the work which Charles Reade always terms in his MS. '*Sera nunquam*,' his late, but not too late, masterpiece.

(4) That 'Pride and Prejudice' being the very opposite of all Charles Reade's work, is on that account superior. Well, some people like brandy; some weak tea; but it won't do to argue that weak tea is stronger than brandy.

The rest of the reviews took up the same style of parable, evidently in indecision whether to heave "'arf a brick" at the venturesome author who *had* broken new ground, or to anticipate

the public enthusiasm. In the United States criticism, as a science, was in its infancy; and most of the leading journals contented themselves with an exhaustive analysis of the plot, one among the number, 'The Boston Daily Evening Traveller,' devoting no less than three columns of close print to this achievement. Had the voice of the press, whether cis-Atlantic or trans-Atlantic, prevailed, no doubt the book would have fallen still-born. It happens, however, that the *ultima ratio* does not lie with quill drivers, whether of the highest culture, such as those on the 'Saturday Review,' or of the shoddiest mediocrity, the briefless barrister and the shorthand writer. Beyond these feeble voices is the great public, for whom alone Charles Reade wrote, and this supreme critic returned no qualified verdict. *Malgrè* the prophets, 'It is Never too Late to Mend' was not only read, but re-read, and not only re-read but also read perennially. The book was triumphant.

They were right in their supposition, that this work had caused its author the severest labour. Later on, a critic described it as in

places "verging on the confines of farce." Yet every detail was verified. Every fact was obtained by research and observation. The idle allegation of carelessness hurled at the most careful of writers was wholly unjustifiable, for in truth the book represents more than four years' toil, and its literary quality is beaten out by no common hand on no common anvil. As an indication of the painstaking energy, we might almost write agony, of its creator, we may fairly quote an extract from a brief and hurried letter scribbled from the Garrick Club to Mrs. Seymour, who then chanced to be on a visit to her brother-in-law, Mr. Gibson, a Scotch clergyman in Selkirkshire. The book was only in progress, that is to say portions of each volume were outlined, but the whole was unconnected. "My first volume," he writes, "will, I hope, take me up to the death of Josephs. By which means in the second I shall quite clear the Prison, and cut well into the other interest. I think it will be a great work, much *abused*, no doubt—but, a reputation. If it is so, remember, I never should have effected so great a work without *you*. The part with which I hope to please

as well as dazzle was all written in your presence, every word of it.

"My mother is delighted with Mr. Eden ; but I am sorry to say she likes the Jew too. So that throws a doubt upon her judgment."

So far as Mrs. Seymour is concerned, this was by no means the language of compliment. She was his literary and dramatic partner, and with her he discussed his plots, situations, and characters. To her criticism he submitted his dialogue. She possessed the faculty of perceiving at a glance how the lines would play and how each chapter would read. To term her part-author would be to exaggerate ; to underrate the aid she afforded would be an injustice. Those who knew him best would be the first to bear testimony to the invaluable services rendered throughout his career by this clever, if not very highly cultured, woman.

The following, also to Mrs. Seymour, who apparently was about to return from her long sojourn in Scotland to their joint habitation in Bolton Row, seems to show that, after all, and in spite of his prophecy that 'It is Never too Late to Mend' would constitute the basis of

his reputation, he hardly dared expect a second edition. No author ever felt so acutely the lash of criticism. A syllable of detraction in his eyes covered fatally a multitude of laudations, and as the censors had elected to be censorious, his hopes were rudely dashed, and barely able to revive.

"I am hard at work," he says, "punctually and steadily. I really believe he (Bentley) is going into a Second Edition next week. Criticisms in 'The Critic' and 'The Spectator,' the former very warm, especially in praise of the Prison business; the latter also warm on that point, but disgusted with Meadows and Levi. So that if I listened to my critics, there is nothing somebody or other would not cut out, and if I listened again, there is nothing I should not restore.

"There is an old Greek story of a painter who exposed his picture in the market-place for criticism. 'Here is a bit of black chalk,' said he, 'mark the faults.' The multitude of critics marked out every square inch of the picture. He washed off the marks. 'Now mark the beauties,' said he. The critics marked every square inch of the picture.

"I never realised the wisdom of this story until now.

"I have just sent Webster a note consenting to treat on his terms, for that drama you know.

"Also to Bentley, offering to purchase the copies of 'Woffington' that remain on hand. So you see I have some faith in my ultimate success; all depends on this: (1) Whether I can give up eating too much; (2) whether I can have one cheerful sympathizing soul to bear me up.

"I killed Carlo to-day and wept sore, snivelling, but not saving his life any more for that. Snivelling over him and killing him, syllable by syllable. Pah! isn't it sickening?

"A Brewer is High Sheriff for our county. Yesterday he gave a dinner to the magistrates, my brother among the rest—cost £600. There was a sugar-ship, six foot high, full rigged, with guns!"

It is superfluous to add that his hesitating prognostication of a second edition was verified. It would be gratifying to know how many editions both in England and America succeeded it. A bookseller at Clifton three

years later informed the writer of these lines, that he sold more copies of 'It is Never too Late to Mend,' than of 'Uncle Tom's Cabin'; probably the number of readers could only be reckoned by the million.

In the following January an Irish lady wrote a string of inquiries, which Charles Reade answered as follows:

*"6, Bolton Row, Mayfair,
Jan. 7, 1857.*

"MADAM,

"The details in question *are* founded on fact.

"Of course I have invented many things, but not a single horror.

"The Christian clergyman is a pure fiction; there was no such creature in that place, but Mr. Hawes is a living man. He has murdered his fellow-creature exactly as I have described, has suffered three months' imprisonment in a debtors' prison, and is now abroad, angry with the Government, thoroughly self-satisfied, and un-hung, though not, I flatter myself, ungibbeted.

"Those black facts have been before the public, before ever I handled them; they have

been told, and tolerably well told, by many chroniclers. But it is my business, and my art, and my duty, to make you Ladies and Gentlemen *realize* things, which the chronicler presents to you in his dim, and cold, and shadowy way; and so they pass over your mind like idle wind.

"This you sometimes call 'being harrowed,' but ask yourselves two questions:

"(1) Do you think you are harrowed one tenth part as much as I have been; as I could harrow you?

"(2) I, one tenth part as much as Josephs, who died under the harrow?

"I have answered your questions broadly. I will do better; I will put it in your power to test that part of my story, if you think it worth while, and it is well worth while.

"I will send you, as soon as I can lay my hand on it, a Blue Book, containing the results of a Royal Commission held upon a certain gaol three years ago. Here you will see my darker facts and many more deposed to on oath.

"Meantime, if you or any of your friends file 'The Times,' look it over from the 6th to the 16th September, 1853.

"I am glad you care whether these things are true or false.

"You have done wisely and well to come to *me* to know.

"I am obliged by your kind expressions; and the length of this letter will, I trust, show you that I am not indifferent to your good opinion.

"I have the honour to be,

"Yours very truly,

"CHARLES READE."

It was a curious coincidence, that although the author of 'It is Never too Late to Mend' here affirms with emphasis that there was no Christian clergyman in the gaols he investigated in search of material; one of the gaol chaplains on whom he passed this censure was subsequently promoted to a living in the gift of the Crown for his humanity in assisting in the reform of a too rigorous system within the walls of the gaol wherein he ministered; and that this same gentleman should have only survived Charles Reade by a few weeks. His defect apparently lay in a lack of preaching power.

CHAPTER III.

A VINDICATION OF SHAKESPEARE.

WE have hitherto purposely omitted to catalogue Charles Reade's minor achievements prior to the issue of 'It is Never too Late to Mend.' To have dwelt on small successes and yet smaller failures would have been to distract the eye from the approaching climax. At the same time, it may be only a fitting tribute to his muse to mention some among his ephemeral works.

'Masks and Faces' placed his name for ever among English dramatists. Played first in 1852, it was succeeded in the same year by a piece called 'The Village Tale' at the Strand Theatre. The year following witnessed the production of 'Gold,' a drama in five acts, at Drury Lane. This was the precursor of his yet grander drama of many years later,

and the basis of the third volume of 'It is Never too Late to Mend.' It may be fairly termed a moderate success, since it saved Mr. Smith, the lessee of Drury Lane. That gentleman was so hopelessly involved, that he contemplated a bolt to America—or anywhere—immediately upon the failure of Charles Reade's drama. After the first night he prevailed upon himself to try the result of the opening week; and, after that period had elapsed, began to feed the vultures out of his author's brains. He had bargained to give £20 a week and a box. This he adhered to, albeit he was a very Ethelred in his payments. 'Gold' not only cleared him of the birds of prey, but left him with a round sum in his pocket. Yet the critics subsequently reviled the play as a failure!

In 1854 he collaborated with Tom Taylor in 'Two Loves and a Life,' and also in 'The King's Rival,' which was produced successfully at the Princess' Theatre; while there emanated from his single pen in 1855 a Comedietta, styled 'Nobs and Snobs,' written for the St. James' Theatre; and in the same year he adapted from the French 'The

Courier of Lyons,' and collaborated with Tom Taylor in 'The First Printer,' which was played at the Princess' Theatre.

1856 was consecrated to his great novel, and after that for eight years he ceased to write for the stage.

'It is Never too Late to Mend' seems to have exhausted his energies, so much so that men were found to prophesy that he would prove a one-book author. He wrote, it is true, but with a pen that had for the nonce lost some of its vigour and its charm. 'The Course of True Love Never did run Smooth' was indeed a falling off after his glorious '*Sera nunquam*;' while 'Cream,' issued from the press in 1858, seemed like a determined effort to wreck an established reputation. 'White Lies,' we grant, contained much of his former literary quality. He wrote it to order for the 'London Journal,' and, as was said with veracious acerbity at the time, tried to descend to the level of a servant girl and shop-boy circulation. He nevertheless contrived so to charm the readers of the 'London Journal,' that the circulation of that popular weekly quadrupled, and when the book was

published at his own risk for the libraries, though he had reason enough to complain that the critics were no friends of his, it proved a startling financial success. Certain wiseacres discovered that the novel was a plagiarism from the French, and then proceeded to slaughter the author on that hypothesis. They were wrong in their premises, if not in their conclusion, but as usual had not the honesty to confess their error. Others derided the lack of incident and the Gallicism of a drama-novel, whose scene is laid in France, and whose characters, being French, ought, one would suppose, to utter with French epigram, emotion, and vivacity. The author deliberately painted a French book with French colouring. But this was too much for the British critic to comprehend. He railed because the French characters did not talk conventional English, and the reading public seems to have believed what the critics averred. In fact the book was considered to be a failure, yet it finds readers to this day, its best justification.

‘Love me Little, Love me Long,’ which followed ‘White Lies,’ has found admirers,

but not by the shoal; while the 'Autobiography of a Thief,' with 'Jack of all Trades,' disappointed those myriads on either side of the Ocean who were expecting eagerly another work worthy a grand mind.

It was in 1858 that 'Fraser' published a sensational paper on Shakespeare. To this Charles Reade wrote a rejoinder. Whether the paper in question was offered to some one of the magazines cannot be determined. It may have been rejected by the editor of 'Fraser' himself, for aught we know, rejoinders not being always acceptable to editorial *amour propre*. Anyhow it never has seen the light, and we are glad to be able to lay it before the public as evidencing in a marked degree his reverence for the Bard of Avon, and also his exalted ideal of dramatic excellence. It displays his own estimate of the functions of the dramatist, no less than of the intrinsic dignity of the drama. Those who are careless of the reputation of a noble art may not unprofitably peruse the lofty sentiments of one who begged that on his tomb, before aught else, should be graven the title 'Dramatist.'

The essay is termed

SHAKESPEARE AND THE STAGE,
A CRITICISM OF A CRITICISM.

“The ‘Fraser’s Magazine’ for last month has a smart article on ‘Poets and Players.’

“The writer is happily unembarrassed with those doubts that beset the heavy-armed soldier of letters, who thinks twice before he decides, as far as in him lies, subjects wide and deep.

“We go with him in his rebellion against that domineering phrase ‘legitimate drama.’

“The moment words, the conventional not actual signs of things, waver in meaning, falsehood can do anything with them; truth nothing but cut them out of her vocabulary: and legitimate drama has been convicted before a committee of the House of Commons of meaning so many different things as to stand for nothing.

“We should be sorry to throw a universal slur on this article of Fraser’s; for there are sprightly, intelligent sentences in it; but men must stand or fall by their sums total.

“Truths pressed into the service of error

good acting plays for other ages than their own, proves far more in favour of 'Macbeth,' 'Othello,' 'Lear,' and divers other Shakespearian plays, which draw greater houses than these, the sole permanent hits of men greater in dramatic power than any Englishman of this day.

"It is an error in comparing the *inherent scenic attraction* of an old play with a new one to forget that merit is one thing, novelty another.

"A play is but an incarnate story, and an old story well told must yield to each new story indifferently told, though it shall in time survive each. Supposing it true that all novels compared with Scott's, and all acted plays compared with Shakespeare's, are as smoke to fire, we should yet read weak new novels, and flock to feeble plays. Only we should not return to these vomits as we do.

"The Irelands palmed on a class, which our writer thinks Shakespeare's best critics, viz., upon literary critics, a manuscript play by Shakespeare; it was read, discussed: an antiquarian or so said No!; most of the critics said Yes!; and one of no mean fame, Dr

Parr, fell on his knees before the manuscript. It was put on the stage: coal-heavers and prentices set literary criticisms right in ten minutes. Why? The stuffed fish thrown down on a bank might pass for a live fish, but put it in the water. No!

“*The stage is Shakespeare’s home*; he had taught these unlearned persons, prentices, and public what to expect in a great acting play.

“Ireland’s work mimicked his language and deceived the predecessors of this gentleman, with names as great as his own: but when it ventured into Shakespeare’s magic circle the false spirit evaporated. We will now tell this writer, the Irelands, and their conceited dupes, and all cliques, past, present, and to come, what would happen were a great play, brother to ‘Macbeth’ and ‘Othello,’ the *soi-disants*’ bad acting plays of Shakespeare, to be really disinterred. So long as it was only printed and read there would be differences of opinion: all the literary critics would be more or less disgusted with its faults as a literary composition. We should come to the spire with our two-foot rules, and should talk of the ‘evident traces of genius,’ and the ‘frigid conceits,’ and

mere bombast with which here and there the 'writer's most successful efforts are marred,' &c., &c.—all of which would be *perfectly true*,—in the closet.

"It would then pass through the stage door, and come a new thing into fair competition with Sir E. Bulwer and others, who write what Fraser justly calls good acting plays; it would not defeat these writers: *it would annihilate them.*

"The lawyer would leave his quibbles; the philosopher, if there is one, his speculations; the divine his commentaries; the sot his cups; the actors of other theatres their deserted stages; the great, the Swedish thrush, to hear the true nightingale sing at home.

"For years, and years, and years the theatre that held it would be crammed to the ceiling with this single attraction.

"The manager would make a fortune, and running sly would sell to some bolder speculator, who would make a fortune after him, to his disgust; and at last a miracle would top all these marvels, a reviewer who has seen in a vision, not in a theatre, that there are as good acting plays in this planet as Shake-

spere's, would see himself in the wrong, and would find that Shakespeare, actor and poet, knows the business side of his business better than we critics have as yet known any part of a part of ours.

"2. Our writer 'cannot think that Shakespeare, were he flourishing now, would write for the stage.'

"This surmise springs from an idea that the stage has fixed intellectual limits, and a witling of Fraser has discovered what they are. But it is not so: the stage is no more answerable for the bulk of its present faults, than paper and ink are answerable for bad books, and clever monthly or quarterly twaddle.

"The stage was what man made it, is what man makes it, and shall be what man shall make it. Shakespeare *redivivus* would write for the stage now, as then; but now, as then, he would find it one thing and leave it another. He would write it up to him, not himself down to it.

"The German critic who thinks Shakespeare was not specially a *dramatic poet*, has not read the man's works.

"Shakespeare tried the other experiment in

an octavo volume of undramatic poems, larger than the volumes with which great poetic reputations have been made and ought to be made.

“But those dreamy dunces bring simple ignorance or simple conjecture against fact!

“Macaulay has beaten Shakespeare’s head off at Roman stories in verse; but who, novelty apart, can try a fall with him at home, *i. e.* upon the stage. If Moses was the lawgiver, Shakespeare is the dramatist of dramatists.

3. “‘The true reason why rank, intelligence, and education do not go to see Shakespeare acted, is that they stay at home and read him.’

“This is matter of opinion; we are inclined neither to abuse the better class for not flocking to see an old play, nor to give them all this credit. From seven till ten at night is the theatrical period, which happens not to be the intellectual hour of society; on uncommon occasions the higher classes are diverted from Shakespeare by music and novelties, and in a general way by thin soup, strong port, and weak chat; by a natural preference for the society of living mortals over a dead immortal

on boards or paper. That Shakespeare is read in proportion to his literary merits is a day-dream.

“The nation is full of thumbed Tennysons, but its Shakespeares are beautifully clean. I never caught but two men reading this poet, and never a single woman in our whole mortal career. We allow the editions: people do buy Shakespeare, do shelf him, or ship him for the colonies; they do more, they mean to read him, profess to have read him; they look at his well-bound back, and honestly think they must somehow have read him, but read him they do not: we grant that ‘his words of wisdom have become part of our common knowledge.’ But this does not advance the closet one inch against the stage unless it can be proved that these words of wisdom have not been caught from actors’ mouths; it would be easier to prove the contrary.

“What are the quotations in common use? Those coming from the plays oftenest acted: ay, and from the stage copies too.

“At this moment, three literary men out of four think ‘Richard’s himself again’ is a Shakespearian line. Why? Because it is

uttered on the stage for Shakespeare,—and literature, like the public, takes what little Shakespeare it knows from the stage.

“Among the phenomena of letters is this : no old lady of either sex can write a novel without quoting ‘to be or not to be’—which words he, she, and it, understand to mean ‘to take place, or not to take place,’ *vide* every bad novel writer.

“Whence this universal misrepresentation of a writer? From the stage. These words have always been so weakly pronounced on the stage that, separated from their context, they lead the non-reader of Shakespeare wrong.

“The words of course mean ‘to exist or not to exist’: the latter proposition ought to be marked as strongly as the first—that is to say, without robbing the ‘not’ of its stress, the second ‘to be’ ought to be marked as strongly as the first ‘to be’; so spoken they could not be misunderstood when separated from the context.

“But they are not so spoken because actors are asses. To him who reads the soliloquy the blunder is hardly possible; why then, out of so many who quote it, do all misunderstand

it? Because Literature takes its Shakespeare from the stage!

"4. 'Shakespeare is not of an age, but for all time, whence it follows by a legitimate corollary that neither is he of a stage, but for all climes.' When time and place become identical this may be Ratiocination; it is to say that duration implies change of locality. 'The Thames will flow on for ever; *ergo*, some day it must change its bed.'

"We are ready to admit that the dialogue outside Portia's house (Lorenzo and Jessica) is defiled at present upon the stage; two creatures bawling. Moonlight, music, and silence make us sigh for the closet and the speaking book; and other poetic passages have often been soiled in the vulgar hands through which the stage in its present state passes them—indeed if the scale was the balance, these passages would do wonders for this anti-scenic theory. But our scale is not a balance, and for every such passage there are ten in which the text can give the reader but a shadow of the actor poet. On this point surely he alone is safe evidence who reads the volumes by their own bare light. In *our minds* what

we have seen, and what we read, have long ago been inextricably commingled. But eminent scholars who have just studied Shakespeare's text, and afterwards seen him even indifferently acted, have confessed they learned more of the man by one such representation, than by many perusals, and this evidence is of an impregnable nature.

"The reviewer, in estimating the force of Shakespeare on the public when heard and seen, or read silently, is out of his depth; he fancies, as a child or Dogberry might, that written language is a galvanic telegraph from mind to minds, and nothing lost *in transitu*. Alas! this is the brightest but falsest of all his dreams; letters are a clever invention, but not so clever as that. Could a living poet look into the souls of his readers he would see but a sketch of the thoughts his words present to himself; but if that poet had his tongue under command he could, by speaking his lines, lay something of his colours on that sketch. Spoken words are signs of thought; written words are signs of such signs. Could we evoke Shakespeare and persuade him to speak his greatest lines, would this lad pat

him on the back and say, 'you are spoiling the author, my good sir; write it down, you never meant it to be spoken'? No! His prejudice would be cowed by other prejudices, and he would relish these living words more than their black shadows on paper.

"Yet this Shakespeare found in his day actors who, though since eclipsed, could speak his greatest lines up to his intention and more to his mind than he could himself; this is proved by his taking the second-rate parts in his own plays. N.B. The only manager in creation that ever did this or ever will. *Que voulez-vous?* He was Shakespeare in this too; Fraser's decision against the Macbeth and Hamlet of actors is therefore resolvable into Fraser *versus* Shakespeare.

"Comparison of subjects ends the moment the adjective 'bad' is covertly introduced inside a substantive; bad speaking misleads the weak mind as to the nature of speech; bad acting misleads the muddle-head about the meaning of the word acting.

"The real condition of words is this: written words are the fair, undisfigured corpses of spoken words. A vulgar actor, or any bad

speaker mutilates these corpses more or less ; but an artist of the tongue, like Macready, Rachel, or Stirling, restores to those corpses the soul and sunlight they had when in the author's brain and breast.

"Since a comparative slur has been thrown on Mr. Macready's 'Macbeth,' we will join an issue on that ground.

"Let literary critics inspect these lines.

'Better be with the dead,
Whom we to gain our place have sent to peace,
Than on the torture of the mind to lie
In restless ecstasy. Duncan is in his grave.
After Life's fitful fever he sleeps well.
Treason has done its worst : nor steel, nor poison,
Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing,
Can touch him further.'

and afterwards hear Macready speak them. If they have not, as many of our literary friends have, ears too deaf and uncultivated to judge the triumphs of speech, they will acknowledge they could never have gathered for themselves all the heavenly, glowing beauty this Artist restores to the stumbling letter of the text.

"No private reader could ever *see* these words as Glover used to fire them :

“‘Will Sir John take Fanny without a fortune? NO! After you have settled the largest part of your property on your youngest daughter, can there be an equal portion left the elder? NO! Doesn't this overturn the whole system of the family? YES!’ And this force is not superadded, as our critic might think; it comes in most cases by oral descent from the author.

“What mere reader would see the full value of the ‘*Zaire, vous pleurez*’ of Voltaire? The author did. Actors have succeeded to his mind as well as syllables, and it is only by the stage these words are still Voltaire and more than his shadow.

“The reader of Otway comes to these words, ‘Remember Twelve.’ He sees nothing in them and passes on. For years these words were never spoken on the stage without a round of applause.

“‘*Il se souvient*,’ says Rachel, in ‘*Le Vieux de la Montagne*.’ A murmur of admiration bursts from the cold but intelligent Theatre Français; what are those words to any mere reader?

“Read the little modern play called ‘Time

'Tries All'; you are untouched by the letters of which it is composed, yet when Stirling gives the author to the public, bearded men are seen crying, and so it is more or less in all plays; less so in Shakespeare's or Sheridan's than in unreadable plays, but the distinction is one of degree, not kind. Shakespeare's gain as much in themselves, as the Diamond, by being shaped and polished. The dumb-play, that great pictorial narrative, is the ground-work of all human plays; the words are but the flowers.

"Whoever can measure human talent, has observed that a novel equal or a little inferior to a given play is thrice as attractive to read; and why? Because the novelist paints the dumb-play of his characters, and with his best colours too; the dramatist is obliged to leave this to the stage, and the stage does it. Such, then, is the double force of speaking looks and burning words, that it is impossible any play can be in the closet what it can be on the stage if well acted. It was always the fate of the stage to be most talked of by those who know least about it. The stage is the unique repository of oral traditions in lettered nations.

“The melodies Ophelia sings, and her pretty ballad twang, have come from mouth to mouth since Shakespeare’s time, engraved on the boards, not printed in the volumes. The business of the stage, the positions of the personages, are in many cases Shakespeare’s; and it is not to be doubted by those who know the stage, that hundreds and thousands of Shakespeare’s own tones and inflexions live on the stage and by the stage; to perish with the stage, the towns, the palaces, the temples, and the globe.

“*Non omnia possumus omnes.*

“The man of letters, unless keenly on his guard, is apt, by his fixed mode of acquiring knowledge, to be diverted from that fine cultivation of the ear and eye which qualifies a man to say these words to the public about Kean or Macready, in connection with Shakespeare. This is excusable; but a lettered nation, if wise, will fight against those weaknesses that accompany its strength. For the senses, like the stage, are what man chooses to make them. They are avenues by which, if well kept, Wisdom and Beauty have access to the soul. They can also be left fallow,

blunted, perverted, or degraded. Wherefore the stage is of service to man by preserving the great sense of hearing from slowness, rusticity, and degradation; and the great and God-like art of speech from being lost! Ay! from being lost!

“They have heard to little purpose who have not discovered how much mouthing and very little correct speaking there is in churches, courts of law, parliament, and society. *Great speaking there is none!* except on the stage, where there is so devilish little. This need not be so, must not be so, will not be so, shall not be so! But so long as it is so, let us work from the centre which does exist, and create a circumference.

“Let us foster the unique germ of this great art. Let the stage be chastised, not stabbed; lashed, not barbarously tomahawked; let the average manager cease to carry his want of morals to stupidity and his want of intellect to a crime; let the average actor, that strange, mad lump of conceit, ignorance, and stale tricks, be compelled to learn something (at present he is the one spectator who learns nothing) from those true artists of the

A VINDICATION OF SHAKESPEARE. 63

tongue, the face, and the person who now place art in vain by the side of his threadbare artifice : who portray the emotions with various and true looks, and whose golden lips shoot great words to the ear, burning and breathing a beauty, a glory, a music, and a life, that those words can never carry to the soul through the cold and uncertain medium of the eye."

CHAPTER IV.

VISITS TO ADDINGTON AND KNEBWORTH.

AMONG Mrs. Reade's prelatical friends none was more staunch than John Bird Sumner, successively Bishop of Chester, and Archbishop of Canterbury. To the last he corresponded with her, and was keenly appreciative of her society. Perhaps it may be superfluous to add that they were both of the same way of thinking, evangelical to the core.

In his earlier days this good churchman and charming gentleman had been a constant visitor at Ipsden; and among Mrs. Reade's children, if we except her daughter Julia, none attracted him more than Charles. Had the son been infected with his mother's ardent religious zeal, and embraced the clerical profession, Dr. Sumner would have spared no efforts to push him to the fore. His

bias, as we know, lay in a different direction, but the archbishop had a long memory for the young man in whom formerly he had felt so warm an interest. No sooner had his reputation been firmly established by the triumph of 'It is Never too Late to Mend,' than the archbishop hastened to offer him the hospitality of Addington.

It might be pre-supposed that Charles Reade, of all men, was the last to endure social penance under an archi-episcopal roof. That, however, would be to do him injustice. The son of the most courtly of gentlemen, he had inherited the very type of manner to charm Dr. Sumner. He knew beforehand that he would be not merely a welcome, but an appreciated, guest; nor was he, like many dwellers in the land of Bohemia, so wretchedly narrow-minded as to despise scholarship and learning. Over and over again he was heard throughout his career to employ the same formula, "I like so-and-so. At all events he is a gentleman:" the inference being that it was his hard fate to rub shoulders with very many bipeds of the male variety, who were much the reverse. Besides, in the case

of Dr. Sumner he had to encounter a dignitary as keenly capable of relishing a dramatic situation or an epigrammatic dialogue as his worthy uncle, Mr. Faber, who on one occasion strove, though the Fates happened to be against it, to bring him in contact with his warm friend, the poet Southey.

He accepted the kindly archbishop's invitation, and this is how he describes his sensations :

Addington Park, Croydon, Tuesday.

"I got here safe, and was ushered into a nice large bedroom with a blazing fire of wood and coal.

"Quite a small party to dinner ; in fact one stranger only, a parson, a chatty personage enough. One of the daughters, I find, composes songs and sells them on half-profits. Some talk with her about that.

"Bob Sumner, the son, a mighty chatty young gentleman, caught me going to bed, and offered me a cigar on the sly in his bedroom, said room being about the size of our premises ; and having ascertained by its permanent odour that his baccy was good,

I proposed that he should play a solo on that instrument, and that I should be *Nositor*.

"Eyes sparkled in the usual way at so beneficent a proposition, and we sat up talking. It is twelve o'clock (a.m.), and I have seen nothing of my lord yet, so I doubt he is taking a rest after his solo.

"My bed was delicious, so delicious that I have examined its construction. The foundation is one of those springy, French affairs; then, next to the body, a single mattress—a wool mattress, I think, but a *foot* thick!

"I woke at eight, quite refreshed. It is a beautiful day, and I hear some talk of walking out. That will bore me considerably.

"The dear old Archbishop is the same as ever: kind, gentle, and unassuming. I observed that a tendency I saw in him last time, to go to sleep without warning, and wake again, and join in the conversation as if he had never been away from it, has somewhat developed itself."

This may be taken as a singularly faithful picture of a venerable prelate, who was advanced to the chair of À Becket and Lanfranc, not so much because of prominent force of character,

as on account of his sterling worth. Dr. Sumner became Archbishop of Canterbury, in consequence of being personally popular with everybody who was anybody. He was a scholar, and a gentleman; and adorned his exalted office by a sympathetic manner.

Another visit about this period was infinitely more congenial to the rising author.

It has been previously stated, that among the numerous clergy who from time to time accepted the hospitality of Ipsden, Charles Pearson attracted the subject of this memoir most. He had become, by favour of Lord Lytton, rector of Knebworth, and was desirous of bringing together the junior and veteran novelist. As the event proved, the associations of Knebworth Rectory and Park were so agreeable as to have induced Charles Reade to prolong his sojourn in Hertfordshire.

His first letter from Knebworth is to Mrs. Seymour, who was sojourning with her sister, the wife of the Selkirkshire minister, Mr. Gibson.

Knebworth Rectory, Stevenage.

"Here am I, but, alas, *sans* nail-brush, *sans* tooth-brush, *sans* soda, *sans* everything.

VISITS TO ADDINGTON AND KNEBWORTH. 69

“At dinner yesterday, Bulwer, Sir W. and Lady Boothby, and a jolly plump woman, a Mrs. B——, a handsome face, and lively. She wore a wreath of artificial leaves, and diamonds in profusion, set on light sprigs; they shook like aspen leaves at every move, and I expected to see one flirt out and glitter on the ground. It is not usual to wear £500 worth of diamonds at a small dinner party with the parson of the parish. But never mind. Sir W. Boothby was six feet five, and quite as stout in proportion. Bulwer is wonderfully like Mephistopheles, as drawn by German artists.

“I got a splendid idea from him indirectly. I heard him telling Lady B—— that he had *photographs of maniacs* in different postures. Lady B——, who is one of those sweet smiling dolts, only stared, and *told*, as soon as he was gone.

“A knavish speech sleeps in a foolish ear.

“Mrs. Pearson’s remark: ‘poor man! his head is full of his *wife*.’

“This is the gossip of the Rectory. Oh! stop! A trait of the hostess: Dislikes ‘Adam Bede.’ Saw at once it was by a *woman*, and

a coarse-minded one. Calls it 'an immoral book, very unfit for young men. Young ladies may read it—it won't do them any harm, because they won't understand it.'

"Here's paradox for you!"

• The following is also to Mrs. Seymour:

"I think," he writes, "the enclosed will give you as much pleasure just now as anything I could tell you. And please put it carefully away inside my desk in the blue room. It is sincere; or he would not want me to go in for the 'Christmas Tale.'

"We may also hope by this that the tale will not flag, for mind, D—— has been reading a long way in advance of the public.

"To-day Mr. Owen Meredith, son of Sir E. Bulwer, called in a brown velvet coat and waistcoat, salmon coloured shirt, and lilac tie. Very agreeable and funny.

"He writes poetry, you know, and very well.

"That man P—— who intruded on me, pretending to know Bulwer, has intruded on Bulwer pretending to know me, and has nearly poisoned him. I wish I could get Bulwer

VISITS TO ADDINGTON AND KNEBWORTH. 71

and the Minister acquainted. He would really do him some good.

“On Monday I return, but I don’t as yet know by what train. No. of ‘All the Year Round’ duly received. Kind regards to Gibson.”

Again, to Mrs. Seymour, who had returned to town :

Knebworth Rectory, Stevenage, Herts.

“They insist on my staying till Tuesday afternoon, or Wednesday morning. I yield.

“So please send me my letters till Tuesday. I have got a little triumph for you.

“The ‘Times’ came to-day with only half the supplement. I asked Pearson the reason, and he said, ‘Oh, that was all that could go by post under the stamp.’

“So it seems a stamped copy is really weighed by the news agents, and the copies are prepared for posting accordingly.

“The copies go on the railway by parcel, and are therefore always complete when you buy at a station.

“I have been to see the monument of the Reades at Hatfield Church. I am told nothing

is left of old Brocket Hall. I have found out how it passed away.

“Sir James Reade, who died in 1711, had no son, but only three daughters; these would be co-heiresses, and sell, like idiots, and divide the money, instead of one taking the estate and mortgaging it to two thirds for the others. And so we lost Brocket Hall, as we got it—*by the petticoats!* Mr. Pearson says it is a noble park, but the house is new. I have no doubt the Melbournes pulled down some fine old Tudor place, and built a barrack instead.”

This letter simply bristles with errors. The last Reade who held and resided at Brocket, was a spinster. Three of her sisters were married: one to Mr. Secretary Winnington, the next to Sir. H. Dashwood of Kirtlington, the third to Mr. Myddleton of Chirk Castle. Their brother, the last baronet of the Brocket line, died in Rome—as the monument says—“while on his travels,” but really in the suite of the king over the water. On his death Edward Reade of Ipsden, nephew of the first baronet, and on failure of male issue heir of entail, claimed his estate. He employed a

lawyer in Wallingford to prosecute his claim, but the man was unequal to the occasion.

The sisters and co-heiresses of the deceased baronet were wealthy and in possession; they asserted that before their brother left England he had taken effectual measures to bar the entail. Edward Reade was very old and too poor to engage in a costly lawsuit, and so might prevailed over right. On the death of Miss Reade in 1760, this fine demesne was sold, and twenty years afterwards passed into the hands of Mr. Lamb, grandfather of the late Lord Melbourne, and of his sister Lady Palmerston, and is now possessed by her grandson, Earl Cowper.

The following is to Mrs. Reade :

Knebworth, Wednesday.

“DEAR MOTHER,

“I dined with Sir E. Bulwer and passed a pleasant, instructive evening.

“We drew from him a review of the great parliamentary leaders and speakers of his day, and some traditions of the last generation of speakers.

"He depicted their characters, intellectual and moral, very finely and very fairly. He insists that Palmerston and his contemporaries are vastly inferior to the rising men.

"It may interest you to know whom he calls the five great orators of the Lower House:—Gladstone, Bright, Whiteside, Cairns; D'Israeli, super-eminent in irony, personality of every sort, and dramatic talent, but prolix, and inferior in dealing with great general subjects. I wish you could have heard him, for you take more interest in politics than I do.

"Yours affectionately,

"CHARLES."

This is to Mrs. Seymour.

"I shall come home on Thursday, as I said, *malgré* an invitation to dinner from Sir E. L. for that day. He asked me what was my interest in defending French copyrights? They are all alike. Incapable of public feeling, unable to imagine its existence within a human breast.

"He is comic beyond the power of the pen to describe. Goes off mentally into the

VISITS TO ADDINGTON AND KNEBWORTH. 75

House of Commons, and harangues by the yard with an arm stretched out straight as a line. Puts on an artificial manner—Yaw! Yaw! Yaw! and every moment exposes the artifice by exploding in a laugh which is nature itself—loud, sudden, clear, fresh, naïve, and catching as a ploughboy's.

“These periodical returns to nature in her rudest form, from a manner which is the height of transparent artifice, are funny beyond anything the stage has hitherto given us.”

Taken in combination the two last letters are admirably descriptive of the romanticist and cynic, the genius who loved dearly veneer and pose. The concluding missive to Mrs. Seymour travels away from Knebworth to her own concerns.

“It is a wet day and I hope to do wonders with this little farce before dinner-time. I dine with Sir E. Bulwer this evening.

“The Pearsons are most anxious I should stay with them to-morrow. I have told them it depends whether I can be in London at 10.30 on Friday, starting hence early that day.

“I do not understand whether R. has made a hit or not. I hope he has. I have not

much hopes for the ballet—except Thompson they are all sloppy! sloppy!—which is the cause of failure in dancing, singing, preaching, acting, everything—and always will be!

“I cannot see the fun of executing feebly the sort of dance the public has seen done with fire and precision. That is not *Burlesque*, any more than Miss Glyn’s “Stewart” is burlesque. If merely doing things badly was fun, how full of fun the stage and the world would be.

“One comfort is, the public is an ass. Let us hope that by deserving to fail we may succeed.”

Sir Edward Lytton-Bulwer, as he was then, Lord Lytton afterwards, proved in one way a good friend to our author. He introduced to each other the two Charles’s of fiction, Charles Dickens and Charles Reade. Remotely he was of the same blood as the latter, and in art the *frater fraterrimus* of each. His letter of introduction has been preserved, and runs thus:

“MY DEAR DICKENS,

“Herewith let me present to you Mr. Charles Reade, whose works and pen are

VISITS TO ADDINGTON AND KNEBWORTH. 77

too well known to you to need lengthened introduction. He would like to talk to you on a favourite subject of his for improving the interest of authors.

“Yours ever,

“E. B. LYTTON.”

Knebworth,

November 25th, 1859.

Result. Charles Dickens clasped the other Charles by the hand, and they became for ever after fast friends.

CHAPTER V.

COMBATIVE.

It was on the eve of the issue of 'White Lies,' when the public had begun to think that the author of 'It is Never too Late to Mend' was going to prove a one-book man, that he permitted his enthusiasm for justice, always a ruling passion of his, to hurry him into two acts of singularly chivalrous unwisdom.

We have seen how he strove to enlist the sympathies of Lord Lytton and Charles Dickens on behalf of the French playwrights. He had availed himself, already, of French brains—had stolen, as he would have phrased it. But a step had already been taken by our Legislature in the direction of International Copyright; and it was still open to question whether the dramatic rights of the foreigner

could be, as they ought in equity to be, safeguarded.

To test this, Charles Reade went to Paris, interviewed M. Maquet, bought a play of his — ‘The English Right of Reproduction’ — for £40, and came home to assert it. To commence operations he entered his claim at Stationers’ Hall, advertised his sole proprietorship, and had not long to wait before it was challenged.

First, Mr. Sterling Coyne asked to be allowed to play his own adaptation of Maquet’s piece at the Surrey Theatre. This was granted with reluctance. But no sooner had Coyne’s play been advertised than, *presto*, two unheard-of authors announced another adaptation at the Strand. Mr. George Annesley was accordingly instructed by Charles Reade to warn them against this infringement of his rights; and later, in company with that able solicitor, he called and politely stated his resolve to attack them. They saved him, however, the trouble of becoming plaintiff by commencing an action against him for slander of their title, which he had stigmatized as piracy.

He fought it out to the end, and won his cause with costs; whereupon one of the dramatic anonymuncles went bankrupt with all possible celerity; and the other, after going to prison and threatening the Insolvent Court, eventually paid a fraction of his debt by instalments. In the long run, Charles Reade emerged from his litigation a loser of £210, not to mention time and temper. The latter found an easement in the publication of a record of these proceedings. The book, styled 'The Eighth Commandment,' is as terse, epigrammatic, and, we must add, hysterical as its subject is dreary. He published it at his own risk, per Messrs. Trübner, and probably added to the losses of the lawsuit not inconsiderably. A little more of this sort of unwisdom would have wrecked an established reputation. Mudie declined 'The Eighth Commandment,' and the reviews refused to regard it as serious. Its author very quickly perceived that he had perpetrated an error, and in private acknowledged it. He had been in effect piling Pelion *super* Ossam.

The Ossa to which we refer was a bit of Quixotism of a different sort. His study of

criminal life, if not the natural bent of his mind, had led him to believe, there being indisputably an immense mass of injury and cruelty, injustice and oppression, in this wicked world, that it was the mission of all good and true men to battle with it. Dickens held very much the same idea; but he was practical and unenthusiastic compared with Charles Reade. The latter, in the spirit of one of his knight-errant ancestors, burned with a desire to redress wrong and punish robbery. Hence, when a tale of suffering was poured into his ears, they were only too ready to listen.

The first subject for whom he elected to break a lance was a certain Mr. Fletcher. Near and dear relations averred that this gentleman was insane. Most assuredly, if manner be at all a test of sanity or its opposite, a casual observer would have cordially agreed with the relatives. The writer has a vivid remembrance of his prolonged agony during a breakfast to which he was invited in order to meet the said Mr. Fletcher. It may be that the gentleman's brain was abnormally excited by the conversation happening to turn on his own grievance. But *certes*, when a young man

elects to brandish his knife in order to point a moral and adorn a tale, one can but argue cerebral irritation on his part—and that, too, of a rather alarming type,—and wish he, or you, were somewhere else. What, however, appeared to commonplace minds to resemble, let us say, a splendid presentment of lunacy, to Charles Reade seemed only a charming and natural vivacity. It would be libellous to affirm that the gentleman was mad, nor do we hazard so much as a suggestion of derangement. The knife, however, which he employed much as the late M. Jullien his *bâton*, might have been termed a colourable pretext. His champion, nevertheless, believed in him heartily, and espoused his cause with amazing warmth. These are his reflections concerning the Fletcher episode many years after it had terminated, and he was a wiser man :

“In the intervals of writing novels and dramas,” he remarks, “I have had many lawsuits, for myself and others. My own were principally in defence of my literary property. Of the others, one is worth mentioning. There is a commercial house of some importance, Fletcher and Company. The firm was

troubled with a relative, a nephew, a young fellow who drank, had fits, wasted money, and above all, claimed £35,000 of the House as his father's representative. They put him into a madhouse. He escaped, and threw himself on my protection. I found him a solicitor, who took proceedings; and I kept the plaintiff twelve months at my own expense, and brought him up to the scratch, sober. He was examined eight hours, and his sanity so cleared that defendants succumbed and compromised the case for an annuity."

He judiciously omits to state what this little business cost him, over and above time, trouble, and ceaseless worry. Enough that he cried after it was over, "No more Lawsuits! No more Eighth Commandments! No more Fletchers!"

Unfortunately he did not entirely adhere to this admirable resolution. But of that anon.

It must have been clear to him at this point in his career, that he had frittered away at least three invaluable years. But he was still young, fond of cricket and American bowls, with plenty of elasticity left, nor had he in the least lost

faith in himself. The one thing needful, appeared to be another big book—a success, which should rival, if not cap, his glorious ‘*Sera nunquam*.’ The critics had told him that there was nothing he could not do, if only he would rise to his highest level, and he had but to verify their flattering assurance. Hitherto he had placed unbounded faith in what we may term Gallicism. He was fond of asseverating that the French are the only real masters of prose in Europe, and had written very much with a French pen, though in his native tongue. Qualified success, however, too closely akin to failure, had shaken his belief in Anglo-French dialogue, scenery, and situations. One must do in Rome as Rome does, and to please the British public a writer has to consider British sentiment. He seems, therefore, to have gathered together all the forces at his command for another supreme effort. In ‘It is Never too Late to Mend’ he had paralleled ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin.’ His next achievement would be in the domain of the greatest master of romance, Sir Walter Scott. The threads of the book, as yet unconceived, came to him as by inspiration, one after another. He read

for it, and up to it, following his old lines, and verifying each minute detail. He laboured so hard as at last to weary of the labour—it overtaxed even his Titanic industry. But he achieved in the end a grand and lasting result. He never regarded the book as his masterpiece, proving thereby that the maker is seldom the best judge of his own work. Yet the verdict has long since been unanimous, that this same painfully evolved monument of fiction is not only his best, but further, one of the rarest gems of English literature. A Fellow of Magdalen, with a very acute intellect of his own, on its first appearance aphorized concerning it—"There has been nothing like this since Sir Walter Scott."

And now, so far as we are able, to tell the story—we might almost say, the adventures—of this remarkable book.

He bargained with the proprietors of 'Once a Week' to contribute a serial to their columns. It has been stated, on what seems to us authority, that after the appearance of the first few numbers of this same serial, styled 'A Good Fight,' 'Once a Week' rose in circulation twenty thousand copies—or more,

the figures having been duplicated by some of the author's more ardent admirers. Of the accuracy of this arithmetic we cannot speak with certainty. Enough that the story fascinated its readers, but not, apparently, the editor of the Magazine,

Its genesis *ab ovo* is rather obscure. Before it dazzled the public, no living being would have accredited Charles Reade with a plunge into the *moyen age*.

"What," cried he to the writer of these lines, who during his undergraduate days had been severely bitten by the prevailing Puginism of young Oxford, "are you mediæval?" Yet, if the tone of this query was contemptuous, it is none the less a fact that he evinced a curious interest in his *vis-à-vis* on Number 2 Staircase, New Buildings, The Reverend Dr. Bloxam, who had been in his youth Cardinal Newman's curate at Littlemore, and was immersed in antiquities of all sorts, more particularly ecclesiastical. This student's rooms were over-crowded with mediæval curios, and might, at the time, have been termed one of the sights of Oxford. Moreover, Dr. Bloxam had just published the first volumes of a work

involving immense research, being in fact a *catalogue raisonnée* of every member of Magdalen College from 1460 A.D. to 1860 A.D. It is, therefore, more than probable that the naked idea of 'A Good Fight' occurred to its author's mind from observation, not unmixed with amazement, of the labours of his College friend and contemporary. Dr. Bloxam had thoroughly and successfully antedated his existence by several centuries. Charles Reade on different lines might do likewise.

Events favoured this *beau rêve*. He lighted, in the course of his reading and researches—his eye and mind were ceaselessly burrowing wherever a book or paper presented itself—on more than one volume, which seemed to suggest an appropriate clothing for the aforesaid bare idea; above all on a legend *Latine Redditum*, which told a drama with more than parabolic brevity, and less than human callousness. "Here," he said to himself, "is a fine field for an artist. I have but to take these dry bones with their beautiful and touching outline, breathe into them the spirit of humanity, and they will last as long as the human, or at all events, the English, race."

To do so, he had, perforce, to surmount a congenital distaste for all things mediæval, and strive to enter into the temper and tone of a remote past. That which would have been natural to a Bloxam, to him was so intensely artificial as to necessitate not merely an effort, but an abnegation of his most cherished intuitions. He did it, as he did everything when his will was concentrated upon it, with force and accuracy. He read, not only volumes, but bookshelves and libraries, with patience, if not with avidity. He achieved an act of devolution, and for the nonce became mediæval; so much so that, just as Australians still refuse to believe that the man who wrote the third volume of 'It is Never too Late to Mend' had never been in Australia—this on the evidence of Mr. Dampier, the most eminent of Antipodean actors, and himself a master of melodrama—in like manner the reader of the '*Magnum Opus*,' to which we refer, might almost presuppose that its author was a Dutchman of the period of Erasmus.

The earliest reference to 'A Good Fight,' that we can light upon, is in a letter addressed to Mrs. Seymour in Germany.

"Trübner," he writes, "is in raptures with 'The Eighth Commandment,' and says I can be one of the greatest critics of the age, if I choose.

"I don't choose.

"Catch me at that work again!

"I have got a book over from Paris—two large volumes—on the Hotels and Taverns of the Middle Ages. I find much good matter in it for 'A Good Fight.'"

Again, in a letter a few days later,

"My efforts are now directed to this—to make 'A Good Fight,' if possible, so remarkable a story that Mudie shall be forced to take copies at a fair price.

"I have written a page of 'Good Fight,' but have been compelled to stop there, and to review, and try to digest, my materials. I feel that I must not waste all this labour by producing a mediocre effect.

"It shall be the last time I ever go out of my own age.

"The same labour bestowed on a subject of the day, what would it not have done for me!

"There is something about this weather

very dispiriting. Perhaps that is what was depressing you when you wrote. I have had the same feeling once or twice since you were gone. I do not give way to it. On taking a calm review of circumstances I see no reason to despond.

"A man who steps out of the beaten track in every way, as I do, must expect greater difficulties than other people. The question whether I can overcome them or not, is not settled. When I produce another 'Never too Late,' and the Cabal succeed in burking it, then I will give in.

"Not before!"

The next letter on this topic is so characteristic that we give it in its entirety, premising that Mrs. Seymour seems to have returned from Germany, and after a flying visit to Bolton Row, to have departed to her sister and brother-in-law in Selkirkshire. We will add that Charles Reade entertained the greatest reverence for this gentleman, Mr. Gibson, Minister of Kirkhope. He calls him elsewhere "My very dear friend."

"Thanks for your prompt letter," he says. "So you arrived at the Holy fair—*vide* that

rogue Burns, his work. Small troubles, observing you were in Scotland, have descended on us like hail. Margaret has spilt grease in spots all up the stairs. It rains taxes, and Winwoods, and things.

"*Per contra Millais* has offered me £500 for 'Sir Isumbras.' So that you see I am all right there!

"Brisebarre writes from Paris and promises to back me in the Parisian press—Maquet ditto. Of the English press I have no hope, as you are well aware.

"I need try and keep my temper, and remember that my lines will outlive theirs by many years.

"The book I have had over from France is long; but full of curious knowledge. I don't despair of making 'A Good Fight' a remarkable story yet, but of course I cannot feel sure.

"I have twice attempted to show Conway Kensington Gardens, and twice been caught in a thunderstorm. So I have retired from the unequal contest, and he now lionises himself.

"I hope you will have a fine day during your stay.

"Give my love to your host and hostess."

Again, and in a different vein,

"Yesterday I dined off pork chops, and they were so bad I ate but one. I then made a horrible discovery, that for years I have been over-eating. Dining off that one chop and no pudding I was as light as a feather, and rather brighter for dinner than otherwise. Oh, if I had the resolution to act for ten years on that information!

"Gerard is now just getting to *France*, after many adventures in Germany. The new character I have added, Denys, a Burgundian soldier, a cross-bowman, will, I hope and trust, please you. It will be a daring story altogether. I shall give Gerard a scene with the Pope—Pius II.

"To-day—1860—in London, an Irish labourer hits his son with a leathern strap and iron buckle, and almost flays him alive. He is remanded, but not imprisoned, but held to bail.

"In 1560, as I learn by an undertaker's diary of that time, a master licked his apprentice boy with a *leathern strap* and *iron buckle*, and miserably excoriated him.

“They did not admit him to bail, but set him on a pillory and flogged him till the blood ran down; and set his victim bare-backed beside him to show for what crime, and how exact the retribution.”

Could he have had in memory, as he penned this narrative of poetical justice with such gusto, the thick and the thin canes of the Reverend Mr. Slatter of Rose Hill?

We now come to an episode in the record of ‘A Good Fight,’ which was destined to give it the *coup de grâce*. It would be invidious on our part to protrude any comment on a quarrel between author and editor, neither shall we do so—albeit we have our own opinion. Charles Reade shall be allowed to state his case in his own way, and the world can form its own judgment on the merits of a dispute which would have been the more regrettable, had it not in the long run conduced to the recasting of the book, to its infinite advantage. He writes from Magdalen College thus:

“I am sorry to say that the editor of ‘Once a Week’ has been very annoying, tampering with my text and so on. I have been obliged

to tell him that he must distinguish between anonymous contributions and those in which an approved author takes the responsibility by signing his own name.

"Answer. That with every wish to oblige me, he cannot resign his editorial function.

"Answer. That if he alters my text I will publicly disown his alteration in an advertisement, and send no more MS. to the office.

"On this he seems to be down on his luck a little. For he confines himself to ending my last number on the feeblest sentence *he* can find out, and begging me to end the tale as soon as possible, which of course I shall not do to oblige him. But all this is unfortunate, and makes me fear that I am a very quarrelsome man; or, that other authors must be very spiritless ones.

"It is rather ungrateful on the other side, for the story has done great things for them, as far as I can learn.

"I don't think, however, this is their opinion. They fancy that their paltry illustrations, which are far below the level of the penny press, do the business. Well, I plough

on, convinced that when 'The Good Fight' gets into my hands, and you and I can see it all in one view, we can make an immortal story of it by the requisite improvements.

"It has suffered in serial form by the marvellous incapacity with which the numbers have been concluded."

Lastly,

"They are very anxious it should end. I have *accommodated* them.

"I have—'Away with melancholy!'—reversed the catastrophe; made Gerard and his sweetheart happy; sent Kate to Heaven, and they and their weekly may go to the other place. Any way the story is finished, and they are rid of me, and I of them—*for ever!*

"You are quite right. I shall have many a dig for it. I don't know whether I am to blame or not.

"Is it not monstrous that a person whose name does not appear should assume to alter the text of an approved author, who signs his name to the text in question?

"Another little worry! Sampson Low, Harper's agent, has only just let me know

that Ticknor and Fields advertise to publish 'Good Fight.'

"It is very wrong, when they know I have treated with Harper's. A month ago I proposed to Low to print in advance at Clowes, and send out last sheet well ahead.

"The noodle pooh-poohed it. They must all be wiser than me. Now, too late, he sees his mistake."

Noodle here may be taken as a term of endearment, for it is not one of Charles Reade's superlatives, and he always professed a very warm regard for the venerable publisher, now, alas, no more.

Thus it happened that 'A Good Fight' reverted to its author. He accepted it as so much material for a new, and a far grander, work.

It had not touched his ideal, nor indeed had he as yet so far mastered his enormous subject as to be fully prepared to handle it—as he would have phrased it—immortally. The rebuff of course was somewhat of a trial to his sensibilities; and we have seen that he resented the dry-nursing, which some authors take with meekness and mildness. All was well, how-

ever, that ended well. 'Once A Week' exposed itself to ridicule, for the collapse of the plot was transparent; and the author had virtually led up to a climax only to present a bathos, and after that to run down with comic celerity. The *fiasco* did not hurt him in the slightest degree, indeed it turned out for his benefit. He reverted to his mediæval explorations at Oxford with fresh zest, by no means hurrying himself, and stern in his determination—now that he was put on his mettle—to prove that his Editorial censor was wrong, and he right. In a word he resolved that he would evolve a solid work of the highest literary art.

He did so.

We will reserve the account of this supreme labour of his for another Chapter.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CLOISTER AND THE HEARTH.

To appreciate Charles Reade's literary master-piece, his most enduring success, the highest flight of his vigorous imagination, you must put yourself in the author's place.

It is a fact that more than one writer of fiction, being of the gentle sex, has made her mark by describing dramatically the love-crisis of her own life. There is no heroine to a woman's mind like herself. On that idol, especially when its heart happens to be shattered, she can lay her most startling colours. The picture she paints may be a very sublimated presentment of the original; yet in spite of this harmless unveracity will be life-like, for it represents, in outline at all events, pure nature. Besides, every lady, like the rest of us perhaps, is so keenly in sympathy with

herself. We do not propose to hurl at our author a wild accusation of being feminine. His *virilis cultus* was as pronounced as that of Achilles. Yet, perhaps unconsciously, perhaps intentionally, the crux which his genius invented in order to mar Gerard's life and love was *his own*, and he depicted it as one into whose soul the iron had entered.

Celibacy, like a demon—Charles Reade with amusing inconsequence styles it *a heresy*, thereby unifying such incongruities as doctrine and practice—had gripped Gerard. Celibacy also with its cruel claw held Charles Reade prisoner. Had Gerard married, he would, on the lines of his belief, have lost his soul. Had Charles Reade married, he would have starved. Two-thirds of his life had passed before he could dream of dispensing with what he often termed his prop, viz., his Fellowship at Magdalen. His youth was gone. His middle age was all but gone. He was the victim of the Cloister, if ever man was.

And hermit or monk never realized this better than Charles Reade. There must have been beneath the surface an intensity of personal feeling to paint so graphically the loss of love

and home, and the dull dogged determination to make the best of it. The reader's sensibilities are probed to the core by the sorrowful tale, so dramatic, yet dignified, and raised far above the stage level, by a singularly undramatic ending.

To avoid any possible misconception, let it not be supposed for an instant that the author identified Margaret Brandt with Mrs. Seymour. The notion would be too preposterous; the more so, because the author and the actress neither contemplated nor desired marriage—they were fast friends; that was all. Margaret was a creation, and a very lovely one; and if, as is a moral certainty, she had a prototype in the mind of her creator, it was certainly not a lady of mature age, gifted with a considerable aptitude for business. The unities forbid the bare suggestion.

We have already learnt from Charles Reade's hurried letter that much of the pictorial accessories of the story was obtained by a careful digest of the large Tractate on the Inns of the Middle Ages, which he picked up in Paris. It is a singular circumstance that no trace can be gleaned of his having paid even a

flying visit to Holland; yet the Dutch detail is so strikingly faithful as to lead to the belief that he must have done so, perhaps circa 1859, perhaps many years previous to the book being so much as dreamt of. This, however, may be taken for a bare surmise. In private life he was silent to the verge of taciturnity, and it seemed to be a rule with him never to refer to himself, his experiences, or his travels. It transpired, for example, in his later years, that he had habitually made purchases of pictures and curios in different places; yet, when he sat down to recollect where these valuables were waiting to be called for, his memory was at fault. Some he recovered; others, indeed most, were lost. His mind seemed focussed wholly on the literary work he had in hand, and seldom, if ever, to stray back as far as yesterday. He was not only uncommunicative, but mostly oblivious; nevertheless, so vivid was his imagination that he could transport himself into any scene, and depict it accurately by the aid of books or pictures. We have already learnt how minutely he described the Australian gold-diggings. It is quite likely, therefore, that he may have

pictured Holland without ever setting eyes upon its *canards, canaux, canaille*.*

In the preface to 'The Cloister and the Hearth' he states that one fifth only of the book is identical with 'A Good Fight.' The latter work has now practically no existence, having thus been merged in the former. He used his pruning knife, moreover, vigorously with the portions he did retain; and, as has been stated in his letters, reversed the catastrophe, thus in reality creating a new drama-novel.

The book has always aroused so much of genuine interest that we feel justified in continuing the series of letters, scribbled *currente calamo*, but affording an inkling as to its genesis. His researches for material were

* 'The New York Herald,' in an obituary notice of Charles Reade, is responsible for an assertion that he journeyed to Germany and Holland in order to collect materials for 'The Cloister and the Hearth.' We are far from desirous of contradicting this statement, but have to confess ourselves powerless to verify it. The writer was resident within the walls of Magdalen College during the period when Charles Reade was engaged on the work, and also in constant communication with him. He has no recollection of a single allusion to any such tour, neither has any other relative.

mainly conducted at Oxford. He ransacked the shelves of Magdalen College Library, a mine of wealth in itself, as also the Bodleian. This is his first from his rooms in College to Mrs. Seymour.

"Safe arrived—self and puppy. He has run off this morning and, being an idiot, is lost *pro tem*.

"I came down with a Russian—probably a noble. Chatted with him, asked him to call on me, which he did. I showed him the College, but could not get much out of him about Russia. He seems to like England best in the world, for all but climate. This he pronounces more miserable than the cold of Russia.

"He says he never felt himself *a man* till he knew England, and her institutions, customs, and laws. I asked him if the officials took bribes in Russia as reported, and he said 'Yes.'

"I have corrected the MS. Altogether I do think that 'A Good Fight' will be an unique story; and surely this must tell sooner or later, since the reader thirsts for novelty. So, *Courage, la camarade, le diable est mort!*"

Whether he forgot that he had written on the previous day, or imagined that he had written to some one else, does not appear. He leads off, however, with a repetition of his previous announcement.

"Safe arrived, as you see. The Queen came down to-day to see her boy. Unluckily she arrived in Magdalen College just as I was warming on a little scene—they always do, you know.

"Seriously, if she had come at a fixed hour, I would have been at the gate to receive her.

"But any time from 12 to 2 was another thing. Carlo is very ill. I can't tell whether it is distemper, or what. I can't make him eat anything.

"To-day I got oatmeal. The beggar won't touch it! I got to work nicely to-day."

Up to this point he adhered to the old title, 'A Good Fight.' He now seems to have exchanged it for that the story bears.

Here is an example of the vicissitudes of an author in quest of material.

"Alas, indeed," he writes, "'Stuck!'

"That is to say, I found such a wealth of

material about hermits in Magdalen College Library that I have filled three more of those gigantic cards.

"Now my poor little head seems constructed on so narrow a basis, that whenever the ardour of research is on, the ardour of writing is extinct. God knows whether I am in the right path or not.

"Sometimes I think, how can the public appreciate or care for all this labour? At others I say, what real reason have I to suppose that vast successes have ever been achieved without labour and self-denial?

"Sometimes I say, it must be dangerous to overload fiction with facts.

"At others, I think fiction has succeeded in proportion to the amount of fact in it.

"This much is certain: nobody has as yet produced a true hermit in fiction, and Cervantes and Scott have—a sham hermit.

"Then, when I find about five hundred famous hermits in the Church, and no age without them, I calculate that there must have been five hundred thousand obscure ones; the very nature of the character being to avoid notice. The theory then assumes an import-

ance of another class, and becomes a trait in human nature.

“And, from the year A.D. 250 to the present time, I find they were always the friends of animals. To be sure, one of them in a rage (we all get in a rage sometimes) did excommunicate a mouse, but when the mouse died in consequence, he bitterly repented.

“The priest, to whom he confessed his cruelty with tears of compunction, said, ‘Drat them! I wish you had excommunicated the whole race!’

“I have filled three more great cards with the matter, and I must now try to use only the very cream, and that dramatically, not preachingly. It is too late in the story for lecturing.”

The next letter displays symptoms of fatigue. “I am under weigh again,” he writes, “but rather slowly. I think this story will almost wear my mind out.

“However, I now see that, if I had not read all about hermits, and worked out these cards, this part of my story must have been all false.

“I have got a squirrel in and a robin.”

He appears to have remained in College

without a break, for this letter, as those which precede it, bears the Oxford postmark.

"Gerard," he says, "is now Vicar of Gouda, after the grand scenes in cell.

"Those scenes have not come out quite so brilliant as I hoped; but they are very well, and the situation itself has, I think, a prodigious value, and is new in fiction.

"I don't know what I have to do now, but a few desultory notices of his career as a parson, and then the unpleasant task of killing both Margaret and him.

"I hope to get to you safe and well by the ninth of September, after polishing off Ipsden and Farley Hill. Shall only shoot at Ipsden. Agree with you, why kill anything as long as there are butchers?"

The following bears the date Sep. 3, and is from Ipsden.

"I send you up the greater part of vols. 2 and 3—'The Cloister and the Hearth.'

"Please call on Mr. Bentley with them and explain, that vol. 1 will end on page 36 of the present vol. 2, making 360 pp.; vol. 2 either at 50 or 98 of present vol. 3, at the end of that string of strong situations with which you

happen to be acquainted, as I read them to you at Margate, concluding with G.'s attempt at suicide.

"I am of opinion that matters quite distinct from Mr. Bentley's desire to do business with me on liberal terms, of which I am convinced, or of the merit of the book on which I have bestowed such prodigious labour, will prevent our coming together this time.

"I cannot, therefore, give him the *refusal* upon any other terms. For I feel I should be subjecting my whole work to a certain refusal, and it is not worth while.

"These materials, the time I have bestowed, and my past performances, furnish, I think, sufficient materials for a commercial decision. You can, however, freely add whatever you know of the plot, and situations, etc. not here contained, and pray give Mr. B. an unbiassed opinion. In fact, you can read him this letter if you like. I shall follow very shortly on its heels.

"Yours very sincerely,

"CHAS. READE."

Two months later—the autumn, he writes thus:

"I think I shall run up to town from Saturday till Monday. I will never attempt an old world story again. Good Heavens! How often have I been stuck!

"However, I have done 150 pages, and don't seem to dislike the story. I hope to cram it with incidents, but not to repeat the same ones."

Again :

"Story goes slow. But is to be, must be, successful—please God.

"Henceforth I shall remember the advice, *soyez de votre siècle*. I am convinced that learning and research should be applied to passing, not to past, events. In the same sense alone is Dickens a learned man, and mark the result!

"By the bye, I have accepted his invitation for the 18th Jan."

Again, a few weeks later :

"Denys and Gerard are parted, and the story is now in Holland, and I hope will soon be at Rome.

"When I have brought Gerard back, a monk, to Tergou, I hope to come to Bolton Row, since, after that, the matter can be calculated (I think) to a few pages.

"I can't tell whether it will succeed or not, as a whole. But there shall be great, and tremendous, and tender things in it."

Lastly, from Dogmore End.*

"You will be glad to learn that last night at nine o'clock, amidst the cheers of my relations, I wrote the last page of this tremendous work, which in all probability will impoverish me for some time to come.

"No matter! It is done! And I breathe again. Strange to say, the last fifteen pages went smooth as oil; and I don't know whether it is parental vanity, but I think they will live!"

That prediction has been, will be, verified. The only difference of opinion is concerning its artistic value, both absolute and relative. Here there exists by no means a general consensus—not a few of his critics contending that 'Romola,' which followed close upon its heels, contains characters more true to human nature and mediæval life, and sustains the interest throughout in a higher degree.

Without prejudging this controversy one

* His brother William's residence, about seven miles from Henley on Thames.

way or the other, we will afford our readers the opportunity of contrasting the verdict of differing critics, and for this purpose select, on the side of Charles Reade, Mr. Walter Besant, and an anonymous writer in 'Once a Week'; and on the side of George Eliot, Mr. W. L. Courtney; with Mr. A. C. Swinburne as neutral, albeit rather for Reade than Eliot, so far as regards this particular theme and its treatment.

First, the Pro's.

Mr. Besant writes: "There remains one book of his—it is his greatest work—and, I believe, the greatest historical novel in the language. I mean 'The Cloister and the Hearth.' It has been my happy lot to pasture in the fair fields of mediæval literature, and my delight humbly to attempt from time to time the restoration of life as it was during or before the great Renaissance. Now, life at all times, except perhaps during the cave and flint-weapon period, has been and is many-sided, complex, and perpetually varying. Think how it will fare in five hundred years with the writer who attempts to pourtray England in this year of grace; by what mighty labours—

what examination of old documents—what comparisons, reading of contemporary essays, descriptions of functions, ceremonies, and debates, estimate of forces—as, the influence of the Land League, the real power of the Nonconformists, the strength of the Church, the prejudices of the people—he will arrive at something like a picture of life as it is now. And even in the hands of the most skilful, how meagre will probably be the result! Because the historian will not be able to understand the relative importance of questions, nor will he perceive, that what seems to him the most important of events may have seemed to us a mere trifle compared with the weight of a speech in the House, or a new book, or even an article in a magazine. Therefore I do not say that the whole of life, as it was at the end of the fourteenth century, is in ‘The Cloister and the Hearth.’ But I do say, that there is portrayed so vigorous, lifelike, and truthful a picture of a time long gone by, and differing in every particular from our own, that the world has never seen its like. To me it is a picture of the past more faithful than anything in the works of Scott. As one

reads it, one feels in the very atmosphere of the century; one breathes the air just before the great dawn of learning and religion; it is still twilight, but the birds are twittering already on the boughs; it is a time when men are weary of the past, there is no freshness or vigour in the poetry; all the tunes are old tunes. There is plenty of fanaticism, but no faith; under the tiara the Pope yawns; under the scarlet cloak the Cardinals scoff; in his chamber the scholar asks whether the newly-found Greek is not better than all the ecclesiastical jargon; in the very cloister are monks secretly at work on the new learning and cursing the stupid iteration of the bell. Even the children of the soil are asking themselves, how long?—Alas! they must wait till the greater Jacquerie of 1792 relieves them; there is uncertainty everywhere; there is the restless movement which goes before a change. There is, however, plenty of activity in certain directions. Soldiers fight and great lords lead armies; there are court ceremonies, at which knights feast, and common people gape; prentice lads go a wandering along the roads; with them tramp the vagrant scholars; the

forests are full of robbers; the beggars are a nation to themselves, and a very horrible, noisome, miserable nation; the towns are crowded within narrow walls; fever and the plague are constantly breaking out; there is no ladder by which men can climb except that lowered for them by the Church; where a man is born, there he sticks. A fine picturesque time, with plenty of robberies and murders; vast quantities of injustice; with lords among the peasants, like locusts among corn, devouring the substance; with fierce punishments for the wicked, but not so fierce as those which certainly await most people in the next world; with gibbets, racks, red-hot pincers, wheels, processions of penitents, heavy wax candles, cutting off of hands, and every possible stimulus to virtue; yet a world in which virtue was singularly rare. All this life—and more—is in ‘The Cloister and the Hearth’ not described, *but acted*. The reader who knows the literature of the time says to himself as he goes on, ‘Here is Erasmus; here is Froissart; here is Deschamps; here is Coquillart; here is Gringoire; here is Villon; here is Luther,’ and so on, taking pleasure in

proving the sources. The reader who does not know, or does not inquire, presently finds himself drawn completely out of himself and his own times; before he reaches the end, he thinks like the characters in the book; but besides, there runs through it the sweetest, saddest, and most tender love-story ever devised by wit of man. There is no heroine in fiction more dear to me than Margaret; she is always real; always the true woman; brave in the darkest hour; and for ever yearning in womanly fashion for the love that has been cruelly torn from her.

“‘Oh, my love,’ cried the lover-priest at her death-bed, ‘if thou hadst lived, doubting of thy Gerard’s heart, die not so, for never was woman loved so tenderly as thou this ten years past.’

“‘Calm thyself, dear one,’ said the dying woman with a heavenly smile; ‘I knew it; only, being but a woman, *I could not die happy till I heard thee say so.*’

“Comparison between ‘The Cloister and the Hearth’ and ‘Romola’ is forced upon one. Both books treat of the same period; similar pictures should be presented in the pages of

both. Yet—what a difference! In the man's work we find, action, life, movement, surprise, reality. In the woman's work we find languor, tedium, and the talk of nineteenth century puppets dressed in fifteenth century clothes. Romola is a woman of the present day; Tito is a man of the present day; the scholar belongs to us; Savonarola is like a hysterical Ritualist preacher; Tessa is a modern Italian peasant girl; nothing is mediæval but the names and the costumes. Yet I believe there may be found people who call 'Romola' a great novel, and who have not even read the story of 'Gerard and Margaret!'"

The above is a lengthy extract; nevertheless to have curtailed it would have been to mutilate the ablest brief that has been held—and without retainer—for the author of 'The Cloister and the Hearth.'

The next, on the same side, issues from the pen of an anonymous writer, and is closely analytical. 'Once a Week,' for the sake of this very book, had quarrelled with its most illustrious contributor. It may possibly have designed the article to which we now refer as

an *amende*. We take it to be in intention an apologetic criticism, as genuine as it is honourable.

"In 1860," it commences, "Mr. Reade produced a mediæval novel with an idea-ed title 'The Cloister and the Hearth.'

"His faithful imitator (George Eliot) soon followed with a mediæval novel, whose title was un-idea-ed, 'Romola.'

"Here the two writers meet on an arena that tests the highest quality they both pretend to—imagination.

"What is the result? In 'The Cloister and the Hearth' you have the middle ages long and broad. The story begins in Holland, and the quaint Dutch figures live; it goes through Germany, and Germany lives; it picks up a French arbalestrier, and the mediæval French soldier is alive again. It goes to Rome, and the Roman men and women live again.

"Compare with this the narrow canvas of 'Romola,' and the faint colours. The petty politics of mediæval Florence made to sit up in the grave, but not to come out of it. The gossip of modern Florence turned on the mediæval subjects and called mediæval gossip.

Romola herself is a high-minded, delicate-minded, sober-minded lady of the nineteenth century, and no other. She has a gentle, but tame and non-mediæval affection for a soft egotist who belongs to that or any age you like. One great historical figure, Savonarola, is taken, and turned into a woman by a female writer—sure sign imagination is wanting. There is a dearth of powerful incidents, though the time was full of them, as 'The Cloister and the Hearth' is full of them. There you have the broad features of that marvellous age, so full of grand anomalies; the fine arts and the spirit that fed them—the feasts, the shows, the domestic life, the laws, the customs, the religion, the roads and their perils, the wild beasts disputing the civilised continent with man,—man uppermost by day, the beasts by night,—the hostelries, the robbers, the strange vows, the convents, shipwrecks, sieges, combats, escapes, a robber's slaughter-house burnt, and the fire lighting up trees clad with snow. And through all this a deep current of love, passionate yet pure, ending in a mediæval poem; the battle of ascetic religion against our duty to our neighbours, which

was the great battle of the time that shook religious souls. But perhaps we shall be told this comparison is beside the mark; that a dearth of incidents is better than a surfeit, and that it is in the higher art of drawing characters George Eliot stands supreme, and Charles Reade fills an insignificant place. We will abide by that test in this comparison.

“What genuine mediæval characters—to be compared with those of Sir Walter Scott, for instance—live in the memory, after reading the two works we are now comparing?”

“‘The Cloister and the Hearth’ is a gallery of such portraits, painted in full colours to the life. ‘Romola’ is a portfolio of delicate studies. ‘Romola’ leaves on the memory,
1. A young lady of the nineteenth century, the exact opposite of a mediæval woman.
2. The soft egotist, an excellent type. 3. An innocent little girl. 4. Savonarola emasculated. The other characters talk nineteen to the dozen, but they are little more than voluble shadows.

“‘The Cloister and the Hearth’ fixes on the mind, 1. The true lover, hermit, and priest, Gerard. 2. The true lover, mediæval, and

northern, Margaret of Sevenbergen. 3. Dame Catharine, economist, gossip, and mother. 4. The Dwarf with his big voice. 5. The angelic cripple, little Kate. 6. The Burgomaster. 7. The Burgundian soldier, a character hewn out of mediæval rock. 8. The gaunt Dominican, hard but holy. 9. The Patrician monk, in love with heathenism, but safe from fiery faggots because he believed in the Pope. 10. The Patrician Pope, in love with Plutarch, and sated with controversy. 11. The Princess Clœlia, a true mediæval. 12. The bravo's wife, a link between Ancient and Mediæval Rome.

"Philip of Burgundy does but cross the scene; yet he leaves his mark. Margaret Van Eyck is but flung on the broad canvas, yet that single figure so drawn has suggested three volumes to another writer.

"You can find a thousand Romolas in London, because she is drawn from observation, and is quite out of place in a mediæval tale. But you cannot find the characters of 'The Cloister and the Hearth,' because they are creations."

Thus, and with no small enthusiasm, the

admirers of Charles Reade. We now turn to others, who, though willing to admit our author's ability, view him from a standpoint of their own.

First, Mr. W. L. Courtney.

"The crucial test (*i. e.* as to whether the ordinary novel of Charles Reade is or is not, 'a somewhat amorphous collection of *pièces de conviction*') is afforded by 'The Cloister and the Hearth.' If a man can read it through in a sitting, as he can 'Griffith Gaunt'; if he is carried through it with the same rapt attention, the same suspension of the critical faculty which he experiences when dealing with a work of real artistic construction, then, to such a man at all events, the invention in the book is of equal power with the facts. But if he takes in such draughts as he is able to stand, being incapable of assimilating it in its entirety; if he feels now and again as if he were laboriously getting up a learned work on the Middle Ages, as is the case, it may be suspected, with most readers, then the natural conclusion is, that 'The Cloister and the Hearth,' though a work of great learning and industry, and containing in the fortunes

of Gerard and Margaret a love story of almost idyllic sweetness, is yet not a work of art. 'Here,' one may say (Mr. Walter Besant has actually said it), 'is Erasmus, here is Froissart, here is Deschamps, here is Coquilart, here is Gringoire, here is Villon, here is Luther;' and just for that reason it is imperfect. The scholar's learning is standing out of the holes in the artistic armour; it smells too much of the academic oil."

This, after the manner of inappreciative censure, while apparently equitable, overshoots the mark. In the first place 'The Cloister and the Hearth' in point of length exceeds 'Griffith Gaunt' by more than a third—nearly a half, and that alone would preclude its being devoured at a sitting. Moreover the fortunes of Gerard are subjected to a natural trichotomy. He is genuine lover, rover, and at last Platonic lover—*alias* priest, and the story follows this division. Each part is homogeneous, nor will most people object, that by the time they have reached the conclusion they have forgotten the antecedent portions of the story. This allegation of ours is the more verifiable, because really the

golden thread of the idyllic love story is never severed. It holds together the members, even when they seem to be most *disjecta*. 'The Cloister and the Hearth' can hardly be said to err in the direction of another historical novel, 'John Inglesant,' which for lack of an idyllic thread rambles aimlessly. However, Mr. Courtney has narrated his own mental sensations; and if those of the average reader harmonize with them, then of course there must be some force in his contention. We avow ourselves under the impression that he stands almost alone in discovering no magic spell in a work of genius, as well as of research—but of course we may be partial. *Quot homines tot sententiæ*. There are some people whom 'Hamlet' bores, and who snore through 'As You Like It.'

Mr. S. S. Conant of 'The Albany Evening Journal,' U.S.A., is responsible for a story concerning Charles Reade, which seems to indicate that he himself was more inclined towards Mr. Courtney's than towards Mr. Besant's view. A stranger once complimented him on 'The Cloister and the Hearth' as his *best* novel, whereupon the author's eye

flashed indignation, and he told his eulogist then and there, that if that was his opinion, he was only fit for a lunatic asylum.

We have, perhaps inequitably, placed Mr. Swinburne partly in the same category with Mr. Courtney. Both writers are masters of English and of analysis; but the latter being an essayist pure and simple, and himself undramatic, has less affinity with the dramatist, and more with the philosophical writer who utilized her slender tales to adorn a profound philosophy, and pointed her satire on faith by means of character. Mr. Swinburne is more righteous than Mr. Courtney, in that he blends criticism with appreciation. "Mr. Reade's didactic types, or monitory figures," he writes, "are almost unmistakable—and unmistakable as failures. Hawes, and even Grotait, are not the creatures of a dramatist, they are the creatures of a mechanist; you see the action of the wire-puller behind, at every movement they make; you feel at every word they utter that the ruffian is speaking by the book, talking in character, playing up to his part. Too refined and thoughtful an artist to run the least risk of such an error, George

Eliot on the other hand wanted the dramatic touch, the skilful and vivid sleight of craftsmanship, which gives a general animation at once to the whole group of characters, and to the whole movement of the action in every story, from the gravest to the slightest, ever written by Charles Reade. A story better conceived, or better composed, better constructed, or better related, than 'The Cloister and the Hearth,' it would be difficult to find anywhere; while the most enthusiastic devotees of 'Romola' must surely admit the well-nigh puerile insufficiency of some of the resources by which the story has to be pushed forward, or warped round, before it can be got into harbour. There is an almost infantile audacity of awkwardness in the device of handing your heroine at a pinch into a *casually* empty boat, which drifts her away to a *casually* plague-stricken village, there to play the part of a *casual* sister of mercy, dropped from the sky by providential caprice, at the very nick of time when the novelist was at a loss for some more plausible contrivance, among a set of people equally strange to the reader and herself.

“Again, I must confess my agreement with the critics who find in her study of Savonarola a laborious, conscientious, absolute failure—as complete as the failure of his own actual attempt to purge and renovate the epoch of the Borgias by what Mr. Carlyle would have called the ‘Morrison’s Pill’ of Catholic Puritanism. Charles Reade’s ‘Dominican’ is worth a dozen such ‘wersch,’ ineffectual, invertebrate studies, taken by marshlight and moonshine, as this spectre of a spectre, which flits across the stage of romance to as little purpose as did its original across the page of history; but when we come to the minor characters and groups, the superiority of the male novelist is so obvious, and so enormous, that any comparison between his breathing figures and the stiff, thin outlines of George Eliot’s phantasmal puppets would be unfair, if it were not unavoidable. The variety of life, the vigour of action, the straightforward and easy mastery displayed at every step and in every stage of the fiction, would of themselves be enough to place ‘The Cloister and the Hearth’ among the very greatest masterpieces of narrative; while its tender truthfulness of

sympathy, its ardour and depth of feeling, the constant sweetness of its humour, the frequent passion of its pathos, are qualities in which no other tale of adventure so stirring and incident so inexhaustible can pretend to a moment's comparison with it—unless we are foolish enough to risk a reference to the name by which no contemporary name can hope to stand higher, or shine brighter, for prose, or for verse, than does Shakespeare's greatest contemporary by the name of Shakespeare."

To quote another word after this magnificent exordium would be impertinent and of the nature of anti-climax. We said that Mr. Swinburne approached Charles Reade with the censorship of a critic. His noble words tell in an excess of majestic language his enthusiasm, and that—not sarcasm—is the highest form of intelligent criticism.

CHAPTER VII.

HARD CASH.

FOR once the public and the critics were unanimous, and the chorus of approval which greeted 'The Cloister and the Hearth' gave its author heart of grace. The great book was alike so much of a study, and so altogether a poem, as to have placed Charles Reade in the foremost rank of literature. No carping detractor could decry it as sensational. No candid friend could condemn it with faint praise. It exacted homage from every man and woman of brains; and henceforward the name of Charles Reade could never be mentioned except with honour.

Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, and the lady, who at the moment, and indeed since, was being steadily written up under the style of the greatest of contemporary novelists,

at once bowed the knee before success, and set to work to plough with Charles Reade's heifer.

We may remark here, *passim*, that the artistic ideal of the author of 'The Cloister and the Hearth,' and that of the author of 'Romola,' were contrary. The former, even in four volumes, could be nothing if not scenic. The latter was by nature so essentially undramatic, as when she attempted a situation to plunge hopelessly out of her depth, and barely escape bathos by concealing an utter incapacity under a thick veil of description. George Eliot, in respect of style, depth of thought, and diagnosis of character, justly commanded universal admiration; indeed, her artistic excellence must have been supreme, in that it could invest the tame and commonplace with a special charm. Whether she would not have risen higher had she been less prolix, and more dramatic, may be open to surmise. Enough that, if she could esteem Charles Reade so thoroughly as to adopt ostentatiously a theme he had made his own, he in turn was by no means so appreciative of her pen. He rated Mr. Wilkie Collins far

above George Eliot, on account of his mastery in the art of plot-weaving; indeed, to be candid, we have to admit on behalf of our author a somewhat faulty appreciation of a genius in every way dissimilar to himself. The late Mr. Winwood Reade narrated concerning the sable houris of Central Africa, that they shrank from the white man, not merely as repulsive, but as being in respect of complexion—from their point of view—leprous. In like fashion Charles Reade revolted from a novel, differing *toto cœlo* from a drama in novel form. Such a work of art not merely failed to please, it positively irritated him. The following letter displays somewhat of this temper. His nature, we must premise with the strongest emphasis, was much too high-souled to be capable of the pettiness of jealousy, least of all, of a woman. He could pay a handsome tribute to such lady novelists as Miss Braddon, Ouida, Miss Broughton, and his niece, the author of ‘Rose and Rue.’ He worshipped Charles Dickens, honoured Thackeray, and on one occasion thought Trollope worth dramatising. But he had no stomach for the fulsome eulogy piled on George Eliot, the less so because it became

an open secret that this bold advertisement was the outcome of judicious wire-pulling. As an artist he conceived it the right of every member of his craft to demand a fair field and no favour. No marvel, therefore, when stung by a keen sense of injustice, that he delivered himself rather slightly of the idol before whom, at thê bidding of her own Nebuchadnezzar behind the scenes, the entire press of England did obeisance.

To Mrs. Seymour he writes: "I send you both the 'Cornhill' and 'Temple Bar' by book post, since there is matter in each that interests.

"I can see no trace of George Eliot in the story called 'Romola'—yet I don't know how to escape the conclusion that it is her; for a story by George Eliot is advertised in the July number of 'The Cornhill,' and in the current number of 'The Athenæum,' and *Thackeray* is displaced to make room for the garrulous lady or gentleman, whichever it be.

"However, after all I am not well read in Georgy Porgy's works. But certainly this does not come up to *my* idea of her. Is it egotism, or am I right in thinking that this story of

the fifteenth century has been called into existence by my success with the same epoch? If it is Georgy Porgy, why then Lewes has been helping her! All the worse for her. The grey mare is the better horse. Any way I hope this is the story that Smith has been ass enough to give £5000 for."

There is an acerbity in this, accentuated perhaps by the conviction that his good friend Mr. Smith, whom elsewhere he styles "The Prince of Publishers," and "That most princely gentleman," should lose by 'Romola.' Apart from that, the mind which had devoted years of incessant toil to this same fifteenth century, could but be sensitive of anachronisms, and conscious of faulty drawing. Of course it was galling to perceive a subservient press belauding a distorted picture, and far exceeding the praise it had grudgingly awarded his own masterpiece. Moreover, if ever there lived a man inspired with a passion for justice, it was Charles Reade. This virtue to him meant all the virtues condensed, and his championship of Fletcher, Lambert, the Stauntons, Valentine Baker, and many others, proved conclusively that if he did resent injustice to

himself, he was even more ready to avenge others. George Eliot, who needed no factitious support, bounced on the stage to play to a house crammed in every inch with the claque. The anti-Christian ring, which to an almost indefinite extent influences the daily and weekly press and the leading magazines, rallied to a man round the strong woman—strong in her will, in her animalism, in her command of thought and diction—and, by a combined effort, placed her on a pinnacle; while so subtle was her method, that the warmest advocates of the very Christianity she held up to ridicule were hood-winked into joining in the general chorus of admiration. Charles Reade held her cheap, simply because he realized more acutely than the rest the inherent defect of her art; but it may safely be affirmed that he would have passed her unnoticed, but for the venal pæans that deafened his ears and aroused his righteous indignation. Since then much has happened, and George Eliot, her works and ways, may be safely relegated to the judgment of the twentieth century. Not Charles Reade alone, but others also, have little reason to dread the ultimate verdict, the contrast between puffery,

and priority. The process of natural selection, which already has eliminated from the book-shelf some tons of temporary successes, may yet dispense with such interminable nebulæ, as, for example, 'Daniel Deronda.' Even genius, minus dramatic instinct, *mole ruit sud.*

It has been narrated already how—in the interests of the justice he loved so ardently—Charles Reade extracted the young man Fletcher from an asylum, and provided him with alimony and law expenses for an entire twelve-month. The chief witnesses for the sanity of this alleged lunatic were Doctors Dickson and Rutledge. With the former of these gentlemen our author established friendly relations, and eventually induced him to place in his hands a mass of material relating to the subject of lunacy generally, and the working of the existing lunacy laws. It is to this fact that we are indebted for perhaps the most thrilling of all Charles Reade's romances.

In the preface to 'Hard Cash' its author states that, "like 'The Cloister and the Hearth,' it is a matter-of-fact romance; a fiction built on truths; and that these same truths have

been gathered by long, severe, and systematic labour, from a multitude of volumes, pamphlets, journals, reports, blue-books, *manuscript narratives*, letters, and living people sought out, examined, and cross-examined to get at the truth on each main topic." The manuscript narratives here referred to were from the pen of Dr. Dickson himself. They were digested, analysed, and purged of superfluities by the patient care of Charles Reade, and after that, classified for use under the generic title, 'Dickeybirdiana.' That, however, was not enough. The medical man, who had a soul above his profession, and moreover was blessed with a very pronounced individuality of his own, deserved a niche in the book to which he supplied—not indeed art, but—raw material, and Charles Reade has accordingly rescued the worthy man from oblivion.

"Dickybird," he writes from Magdalen, "comes down to-day to sit for his portrait (unconsciously)."

Like 'The Cloister and the Hearth,' 'Hard Cash' was written almost entirely within the College walls. It was a dreary life for a man so completely out of tune with Oxford. With

the single exception of the writer, who then as Chaplain resided in College, but was much occupied with clerical and tutorial work, he associated with no one, rarely entering the common-room, never dining in hall, and attending the chapel only on Sunday afternoon. The hours were spent in the libraries or at his desk. He complained bitterly of dulness, and seems to have had almost a school-boy's longing for home; yet he stuck manfully to his self-imposed task. For he was possessed by a double ambition, to add to his laurels, and to effect another social reform. It was his mission to gibbet abuses and injuries, to set the ball rolling, in the hope that sooner or later the legislature would spare a week or so from the incessant game of scrambling for office, in order to stamp his ideas with the hallmark of authority. He was the pioneer, and nobody thanked him, nobody recognized his honest labour. Virtue in his case was its own reward.

Charles Dickens appears to have made overtures to him for a serial, on more than one occasion. Since Bulwer's original introduction they had become such warm friends, that

afterwards he referred to Dickens as "my master." Immediately on the appearance of 'The Cloister and the Hearth,' Mr. Wills, the great novelist's partner in 'All the Year Round,' submitted a tangible proposal, to which at first Charles Reade demurred, not so much on the score of terms—£5 a page being the sum offered—as because Mr. Wills wished to retain the American rights, at that time worth about £300.

The following to Mrs. Seymour is, apparently, from Magdalen: "I am sorry," he writes, "the letter and agreement (query, draft-agreement?) are locked up indefinitely, as it makes it difficult for me to reply to Dickens' invitation. I think I shall simply send him a line that I have been advised of Wills' missive, but it is not yet come to hand; and I am here for some days.

"The post is an excellent institution, though you ladies hate it so as a vehicle.

"I have had a fine rout among my papers, and am getting into beautiful order.

"Before letting (query, Bolton Row?) I shall relieve the store-room of some more of my rubbish, and store it in my old boxes in

the back bed-room. This will leave me room for my note-books, my invaluable note-books, with which I have done nothing, literally nothing, up to date.

"I think they *must* have me for 'All the Year Round,' for Dickens is working on a shilling serial, and Collins going to 'Cornhill.' So I shall stand firm about the American sheets, and, please God, shall publish the new story, *hot* (*i. e.* writing each number up to time, instead of completing the whole before commencement) for 'All the Year Round.' A clause gives me the right to bring it out three weeks before terminating in the periodical, and when we have made £5000 by publication we will combine a little dramatic spec."

Pending the settlement of terms with Mr. Dickens, he seems to have been engaged in dramatizing 'It is Never too Late to Mend,' and this probably is the "spec." to which he alludes. His next letter runs thus:

"Last night young Yates performed a lecture, and I fell in with him. Asked this evening by Mr. Alderman Spiers to meet him and a painter, and Mr. Hepworth Dixon. I am going.

"I believe personal contact softens downright asperities (this appears to have reference to the immemorial feud between Town and Gown, Mr. Spiers being a local tradesman of very high culture—a noble-minded citizen). We shall see.

"Would you believe it?—I was so interrupted yesterday that I had only time to reach the *coup* of Crawley being brought on arrested, and you know *I won't work Sunday*. I think a quarter of an hour on Monday ought to do it.

"Dickens' duplicate agreement is signed and sent to Magdalen College, *Cambridge*, so Wills tells me in a humorous note. However, the bargain is struck, and I must put my shoulder at once to the wheel.

"Smith's note offered me £2000 for a novel—copyright four years—lowest price 5s., and another £1000 if published in the 'Cornhill Magazine.' Cash down on receipt of MS. Please not to speak of it, but advise me if you can. The objection is that he wishes to hold the absolute discretion of publishing it in 'The Cornhill' or not. Now £2000 might not compensate me for the loss of the periodical market. Suppose he decided only to publish

make him break out from prose to verse in conversation just as he does, and to use his own lines. It will be new and droll, I think."

Again, two months later :

"I do nothing but write 'Hard Cash,' and very hard work it is. I send another number by this post, and really it does not read badly. To-day I finish the number I ought to have finished yesterday, landing A. in asylum 3, whence he escapes, I hope, in the next number. I have got too much work in hand to be very dull."

This was succeeded by a somewhat brighter letter.

"Your beautiful friends, the deer," he writes, "have developed a trait, which I remember of old. They fight in October, and always on Sunday. (N.B. His rooms looked out on the deer park of the College.) Yesterday I heard the well-known click of the horns. I looked out and there was a brown deer and a fallow deer (query, dappled?—all the Magdalen deer are *fallow*) hard at it. They fought for about an hour, in which they worked round to the front. I came down and found the brown driven against the wall, and the other

facing. Presently I saw the brown down, and knowing he must be killed if something was not done, I ran up, and drove the fallow away.

"Presently an idiot of an undergraduate, not content to let well alone, gets over the rails; but this brought the brown one up, who ran a little way, and then sank down, in which posture the other vicious brute instantly made at him, and gave him an awful push.

"It seemed to take him on the shoulder, and if it did, he is venison. But I really believe he was clever enough to turn his head even in that posture, and receive it on his horns. At least I see him about to-day, though rather stiff.

"I have contrived to leave behind me two small brown volumes called 'Voyages de Montaigne.' They are bound exactly like 'Rabelais,' which is on the hall table, I think. Will you send them down with all despatch, accompanied, if possible, by 'Herder's Epidemics,' which I lent Dr. Dickson? It is, however, 'Montaigne' I am most in want of. I feel like a man walking up a mountain. What I have done is good, I think; but so much seems to be done."

As a matter of fact the aforesaid stag was so severely wounded that it had to be taken to the College stables and assigned a stall. Here, under the fostering care of John, the groom, it grew so singularly domesticated, that it would eat bread out of your hand, and seemed quite grateful for being preserved from its implacable enemy. It recovered, put on adipose tissue, and in the form of venison graced the high table at the succeeding "Gaudy."

As the book progressed his spirits rose proportionately.

"I have left off sugar, which I believe to be poison," he writes; "and, do you know, I relish everything I eat since I left it off. Is not that curious? This morning I made the novel reflection that bread and butter is nice. Recall to your mind my tirades against that innocent combination!"

"I am not at all in bad spirits now, thank God!"

"I already possessed one of the books Gibson (the Minister of Kirkhope) was good enough to recommend. I have obtained the others, and four more in Nisbett's list; but

Gibson, as might be expected, had recommended the *best* ones.

"Simultaneously arrived yesterday a letter from my agent Cornwallis, saying that Harper positively declined my terms, and a line from Harper virtually accepting said terms.

"Corny wanted the story for some mad periodical venture on which he is going to enter—in *full civil war*. Oh, world, world!

"This reminds me of the illustrious chairman's witticism, Tom Taylor, at a Dramatic and Equestrian dinner. 'The society does not propose to employ *an agent*. The reason, as far as I can understand, is an etymological one. Agent is derived from a Latin word "*agere*," "*to do*," and agents have always been just to their derivation by *doing* their principals.'

"Luckily, by one of those gusts of caution, which you have observed, I had already told Corny I should not receive Harper's answer through him."

Again :

"I have shaken off much of my lethargy since I finished Dickson's works; and I believe his detestable, rambling way of writing and eternal repetition caused my woe.

“I am now working on Jeaffreson's book, who is also a rambling, disconnected creature, but not so bad as Dickson.

“Yesterday a bailiff got into an undergraduate's room with an execution, and there remained. The undergraduates put their heads together, and finding it would be dangerous to use violence, adopted the following means: They shoved hot shovels sprinkled with cayenne in at the window, and sprinkled assafoetida. But the grand card was sulphuretted hydrogen gas, which, by some means unknown to me, they liberated from its sulphate, and blew through the letter-box.

“In a word they stunk him out; and I need scarcely say they kept him out as soon as he emerged for vital air.

“We live in an age in which science is diffused, and made useful as well as exalting.”

There is a fine flavour of Goldwin Smith's green coat about this, as also the next:

“I heard some crackers, and looking out of my window saw the Tower with two long lines of bright red running up it from bottom to top. Then looking further to the right, I

saw in the Choristers' playground two enormous bonfires. So I put on my cap, and went there.

"The flame rose thirty feet, and all the elm trees in the neighbourhood a bright yellow. I am now come in, stinking of naphtha—some young gentleman having, doubtless, thought it a fair exercise of juvenile skill to level a fire-ball at Dr. Reade.

"I approve at bottom, but stink all the same."

In the mean while 'Hard Cash' was running its course through Charles Dickens' admirable magazine; but, incredible though the fact seems to us at this date, it does not appear to have been cordially welcomed by its readers. The devotees of Dickens may have resented the substitution of another author for their incomparable favourite; yet in the English language there exist few, if any, works of fiction more exciting than 'Hard Cash.' True, it trenched on ground already occupied by 'Valentine Vox,' yet in a totally different vein, while the sea scenes were unique. The author was able to refer both to a brother who had been a sailor, and to a nephew in the Royal Navy.

He himself had experienced the dangers of the deep, and the quality of those who go down to the sea in ships, during his spell of herring-fishing; and if *mal de mer* kept him ashore, and deprived him of the pleasure a trip to America would have afforded him, he loved the salt truly. That the book should have disappointed Dickens in any sense is unaccountable, yet so it was.

The following letter tells the tale, gracefully:

"I should have been glad to give you another fortnight at Kirkhope," he writes to Mrs. Seymour, from Bolton Row; "and I was rather in hopes the minister's visit might have been later. However, I shall be very glad to see you both on the last day, or last but one, of September.

"I am going to Ipsden, but not for long. I think I shall postpone my visit to the Pearsons.

"Wills called the other day, and reassured me with 'Hard Cash.' They would not care if ran fifty numbers; but they want to end their tenth volume with the conclusion either of 'Hard Cash,' or of its successor. Peevish

nonsense! The story has done them no good, in fact they print 3000 copies less than at the outset. But they seem to bear it very well and ascribe the decline to other causes. Wills is sure it will be a great hit as a book, and Dickens swears by it. So now you have both sides of the matter."

The work, as is stated boldly in the preface to Messrs. Chatto's excellent edition, stung the profession to the quick. Its author was handled insultingly by certain protesting doctors, notably a Dr. Bushnan, physician to a private lunatic asylum in Wiltshire. This was, as it proved, a blunder. Charles Reade, following the old canon of Aristotle, had taken facts for his starting-point, and was armed with them *cap à pie*. As for the redoubtable Bushnan—an Irishman probably, if one may judge by his name—he was confuted by a singular *argumentum ad hominem*, being turned out of his own, as he stated, faultless asylum, owing to circumstances which confirmed all that Charles Reade had alleged. As that earnest assailant of cruelty and injury urged to 'The Saturday Review,' a man must be six times a greater writer than ever lived, ere he could

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exaggerate suicide, despair, and the horrors that drove young and old to them, or—write a libel on hell.

It was during the progress of 'Hard Cash' that Mrs. Reade breathed her last. She was *en route* to her dear old home at Ipsden, where then resided, as tenant of his elder brother, her dutiful son Edward, and was compelled to halt at Reading. Son Charles was summoned to her bedside, but arrived too late. This is his missive to Mrs. Seymour, who seems to have started the same morning for Kirkhope:

"I went down to Reading by the 12 o'clock train, being convinced by a sadness that came over me last night, and which you may have observed, that all was over.

"It was so.

"My dear mother departed this life at twelve last night, after some hours of complete unconsciousness. Dr. Woodhouse had his hand on her pulse.

"She suffered from oppressed breathing early in the day, but this had ceased. And, at the last, she did not die, but merely ceased to live. She drew her last breath just as she

drew the one before it, and my sister could see no change in her dear face when she was gone.

“Such was the peaceful close of a good life, that had in very truth become a burden. The loss of her mind in so great a degree, and the fear of complete imbecility, do much to reconcile me to the inevitable separation. Still, *it must be felt*.

“What years and what memories rise before me! I send off this hasty line.”

It *was* felt and at the moment of writing, for the letter from end to end is blotted with tears.

The little lady, who came from the society of Royalty as a bride to grace a humble home at Ipsden in 1794, rests by the side of her noble husband in the old churchyard. It was more like a triumph than a funeral. The aged poor whom her bounty had fed, the children grown to maturity whom she had taught, thronged the bier; and it was remarked that, just as at the obsequies of another in Willesden churchyard some eighteen years later, Charles Reade seemed to stagger under the weight of grief.

He kept his mother's letters under the title "Reliquiæ Sacræ," and wrote upon them as an epitaph, "Blessed be her memory."

Is it paradoxical to suggest that, in the mind which could thus to the last retain a vivid sentiment of adoration for a good mother, there must have existed a well-spring of good?

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DRAMA 'SERA NUNQUAM.'

THE little spec. promised Mrs. Seymour, on the conclusion, if successful, of 'Hard Cash,' remained in abeyance for some time. A friendly critic once styled the stage Charles Reade's will-o'-the-wisp. That in a pecuniary sense was true, and when his eulogist in 'Temple Bar' sneered at a venerable Presbyterian divine for not declining a small legacy, because, forsooth, the money wherewith that bequest would be paid was "earned" (*sic*) by a playwright, he omitted, with singular inconsequence, to strike a debtor and creditor account between Charles Reade and the theatre. The novelist made money, handsome sums at times, by his novels; the dramatist was singularly unfortunate in nearly all his theatrical speculations. In short, so

far from the theatre having contributed to his fortune, it actually diminished it. His Presbyterian friend and mentor did not handle theatrical gold, for there was none to handle.

We will at once, however, place our author's connection with the drama on its real basis. It was his ambition. He held the drama to be the apex of all art, the superior of poetry, painting, sculpture, music, architecture. To musical composers he could be unjust; and we have seen him throw down a volume of poems with the sarcastic comment, "Beyond my comprehension." As we have already said, a novel obtained value in his eyes in proportion to its dramatic quality. Such being the bent of his mind, it seemed to revolve in a circle round the stage. If he wrote a successful novel, his first thought was, how would it play? He craved to see his characters at work, to witness his situations; and to hear the thud of the gallery's boots, the roar of its many-tongued throat, the applause of its horny hands. His one desire was to make mankind feel, and be conscious of doing so. That was why he could tolerate criticism with less equanimity than a schoolboy the cane.

The critics were too pachydermatous, too case-hardened, for feeling; and, worse still, they spoke in accents of ice on behalf of a public he had warmed to enthusiasm.

At last, after a lapse of many years, the course of events brought him back to the theatre he loved so ecstatically. He shall tell how it all came about in his own language. The following fragment is entitled, with somewhat of the acerbity of the spoilt child:

READE'S LUCK.

Autobiography is a vile, egotistical thing. It always must be. But there is a set-off: you learn something real about the man, and that is what you will never learn from anybody else.

Let this, and my recent wrongs, be my excuse for troubling you with one chapter of my public life. I cannot divest such a thing of egotism, any more than I can wash the spots out of a leopard; but I promise it shall not be unmixed egotism, but shall lead to general conclusions of public utility.

In that reservoir of delights, the 'Arabian

Nights,' nothing is more charming than the story of 'Sindbad the Sailor,' and the art with which it is introduced: a poor, half-starved fellow, misfortune's butt, comes upon a gay company feasting luxuriously; at the head of the table sits a white-headed senior, the host; homage surrounds him; slaves watch his hand; friends hang upon his words; he is a type of ease, luxury, wealth, respectability. The worn and hungry traveller stands apart and glares upon banquet and host, and his heart sinks lower than ever. Contrasting his hard lot with the luxury before him, he murmurs at the inequality of things, and the injustice of fortune.

The next moment he would gladly recall his words; for a servant comes and tells him the master of the feast would speak to him; he goes trembling, and expecting Bastinado.

"Sit down by me," says the host, and orders his plate to be heaped.

When he has eaten his fill, the venerable senior says quietly, "I will tell you the story of my life."

Then the lucky man tells the unlucky one such a tale of adventures, perils, wounds,

hardships, sufferings, and despairs, as makes the unlucky man think light of his own griefs. Through all these dangers and horrors had Sindbad the persevering passed, ere he got to be Sindbad the seeming lucky.

Now writers are not Sindbads, nor lead adventurous lives: yet at the bottom of things, dissimilar on the surface, lies often a point of similitude. And so when I read, or hear people talk of one Charles Reade's universal success, of his flashy but popular style, of his ease and affluence, I wear a sickly smile, and think sometimes of 'Sindbad the Sailor,' not lucky, but very unlucky and persevering—for, by heaven, it has never been smooth sailing with me!

In the year 1835 I began to make notes with a view to writing fiction, but, fixing my mind on its masterpieces in all languages and all recorded times, I thought so highly of that great and difficult art, that for fourteen years I never ventured to offer my crude sketches to the public.

I began at last, and wrote several dramas, not one of which any manager would read; but theatrical England at this time was a

mere province of France. Observing which, I crept into the Theatre at last with a French translation.

From that I went to better things, and wrote several plays alone, and in conjunction with my friend Mr. T. Taylor; but though my talent, whatever it may be, is rather for the drama than the novel, I was, after a hard fight, literally driven into the novel by bad laws and corrupt practices.

Bad laws.—The international copyright law of 1852 was intended to give a French dramatist the sole right to translate and play his play in England for five years, and so encourage home invention by restraining the former theft. But while the act was being drawn, an English playwright or two, who had all their lives stolen French ideas, and held it a point of honour to die as they had lived, crawled up the back-stairs of the House of Commons and earwigged the late Lord Palmerston. He, good man, meant no worse, and saw no deeper, than this: "Let us make the best shopkeeper's bargain we can for England." But the result was that the English Sovereign, the English Peers, and the English Commons, took their

instructions from a handful of impenitent thieves, and disgraced themselves and the nation. They treacherously conveyed into this otherwise noble statute a perfidious clause, allowing "fair adaptations and imitations" of every foreign drama to be played in England, in defiance of the foreign inventor.

This viper in the basket made the protecting clauses waste paper, and perpetuated dramatic piracy from foreigners in its old, convenient, and habitual form of colourable piracy.

After this don't laugh at the words *Perfide Albion*, for these words are true, by God!

Well, this wicked and perfidious law enabled a portion of the anonymous press to monopolize the theatres, or nearly. No fool can invent a single good drama, but any fool can adapt two hundred good dramas from the French; and any fool can write, just as any fool could spit, the cant, and twaddle, and impudence, and ignorance, that some folk adorn by the acre under the blasphemous title of "dramatic criticism."

So when newspapers increased in number and size, there arose a "*camaraderie*," or compact band of playwright critics, writers

calamitous to the drama, and fatal, above all, to the dramatic inventor. This gang worked in concert as they work to this day ; they toadied actors, however wretched ; they praised every piece which was written by one of their gang ; they flew like hornets at every outsider who did not square them with champagne suppers, or other *douceurs*, pecuniary bribe included ; and then, as now, they sometimes levied black mail on a manager by a dodge I shall expose by-and-by.

The managers of theatres, most of them actors, and extremely sensitive to public praise or censure, truckled to these small fry invested with large powers by reckless journals, and would rather take a French piece, sure to be praised by this little Trades' Union, than an English piece, sure to be censured by them.

I struggled against this double shuffle for about four years, and then I gave it up in despair, and took to novel-writing, against the grain, and left the stage for years.

During my period of enforced exile from the stage I suffered intellectual hell. I used to go to the theatres and see that one piece of unnatural trash after another could get a

hearing, yet the market was hermetically sealed to me. It is usual, under these circumstances, for the disappointed man to turn anonymous writer, call himself a critic, or judge, and, in that sacred character, revenge himself on the successful. Unfortunately, my principles and my reverence for that great, holy, incorruptible science, criticism, did not permit me this Christian solace; so I suffered in silence, and with a fortitude which the writers, who babble about my irritability, have shown they cannot imitate in a far milder case.

In 1865 I tried the London stage again under other circumstances, to explain which I must go back a little.

At Christmas, 1852, Drury Lane was in the hands of a gentleman with great courage and small capital. He invested his all in the pantomime; and the pantomime failed so utterly that after one week they took it off, and pitchforked on to the stage a drama called 'Gold,' which I had flung together in the same hasty way. This drama, though loosely constructed, was English, and hit the time. Not being stolen from the French by any member of the trades' union of playwright critics, it was

much dispraised in the papers, and crowded the theatre, and saved the manager.

Afterwards, when the playwright critics drove me out of the theatre, I was obliged to run cunning, and turned many of my suppressed plays into stories. I dealt so with 'Gold': I added a new vein of incidents taken from prison life, and so turned the drama 'Gold' into the novel—'It is Never too Late to Mend.'

But lo! the novel being written by a dramatist, naturally presented fresh dramatic features, and tempted me to reconstruct a more effective drama. I offered it to one or two managers. They declined, and gave their reasons—if I may venture to apply that term to the logic of gorillas.

Presently piratical scribblers got hold of the subject, and gorilla logic melted away directly in the sunshine of theft. Managers, both in town and country, were ready to treat for the rejected subject, the moment it was offered them, not by the inventor and the writer, but by scribblers and pirates. Several piratical versions were played, in town and country, with a success unparalleled in those

days. Saloons rose into theatres by my brains, stolen. Managers made at least seventy thousand pounds out of my brains, stolen: but not one would pay the inventor a shilling, nor give his piece a hearing.

At last this impatient Charles Reade, like his predecessor in impatience, Job, lost impatience, and went to law with the thieves, and the dealers in stolen goods.

It was a long and hard fight, that would have worn out a poet or two; but after three suits in the Common Pleas, and three injunctions in Equity, I crushed the thieves, and recovered my property.

Then I tried the London managers of the day again. I said, "My amiable, though too larcenous friends, here is an approved subject, which you can no longer steal; but that is your misfortune, not your fault: why not make the best of a bad job, and put a few thousand pounds into your pockets, by dealing with the inventor?"

No: not one would deal with a writer for his own brains.

Hares run through the woods in tracks; men run through life in grooves; and these

had a fixed habit of dealing with scribblers and thieves for the inventor's brains; and they could not get out of that groove at any price.

Seven mortal years did I offer my new popular drama, 'It is Never too Late to Mend,' to these bigots in vain.

Seven mortal years did I see false, un-English, inhuman trash, played at the very theatres which refused me a hearing.

At last a lady interfered, read my drama, and advised Mr. George Vining to entertain it at the 'Princess's.' He did so, and the drama was brought out with great expectation on the fourth day of October, 1865.

The playwright critics were there in full force, and several of them sat together in the stalls, as usual. But the circumstances, under which the play was played, were of a nature to disarm hostility. I had not troubled the theatre for ten years; and even now I was only producing, for my own benefit, a play that had been fully discussed, and approved, when played for the benefit of misappropriators.

It would be hard to find, even amongst the lowest of mankind, a person who could

not feel some little covert sneer, expressed a that had been shy, and objected to interfere years by means questions of public morality." and who now me.

his brains, and then frank, admitting that the always been according means crowded with the sold for their own house itself, as a whole, was thieves.

to the piled agony of the

But, if you were are facts which, though honour, or justice had better be left to the im-kind, don't you gather had overdone his effect; won't find it the tragedy itself repulsive, if not concerted the decision in his cooler moments the first night. Done down barbarity, his play Mr. Tomlins, the strength.* It has been Advertiser,' to how was produced Charles Reade sent by brute clamour. Friend, Dion Boucicault, at Dublin— "his custom ever recipient worth a niche in his huge himself to this with the containing it bearing the sar-a disturbance, which Boucicault on MS. drama, 'Never too would infallibly hold me to cut out Jew and Jacky' being let down an:

"Dublin, 3 Dec.

ever. But, for once

against a man. G your drama 'N. T. L. T. M. cabal on the stage; Fective piece, but, like the nut in the gallery, shaking it wants freedom. urs as it stands.

had a fixed habit of dealing down, "turn the and thieves for the invention the dishonest they could not get out of found the honest price. had spotted them,

Seven mortal years did their articles for popular drama, 'It is Ne-

Mend,' to these bigots in I wrote the piece

Seven mortal years did they had overrated English, inhuman trash, pigot scent of the theatres which refused me it, and carried the

At last a lady interfered 48 nights. The and advised Mr. George V of which £2000 it at the 'Princess's.' He The drama has drama was brought out with ere lauded to the on the fourth day of October clique. It was

The playwright critics it, 1873.

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It would be hard to a mania for calling the lowest of mankind, icenser received them

not feel some little compassion for an inventor that had been shouldered off the stage for years by means of his own brains—stolen, and who now merely asked a percentage on his brains, and the same justice which had always been accorded to those brains, when sold for *their own* benefit, by dunces and thieves.

But, if you want a grain of humanity, or honour, or justice, or manly feeling of any kind, don't you go to a trades' union; for you won't find it there. The playwright critics concerted the destruction of the drama on the first night. They were seen to egg on Mr. Tomlins, the critic of the 'Morning Advertiser,' to howl down the prison scenes by brute clamour. Tomlins, being drunk, "his custom ever in the afternoon," lent himself to this with inebriate zeal, and got up a disturbance, which with a feeble manager would infallibly have ended in the curtain being let down and the play withdrawn for ever. But, for once, the clique ran their heads against a man. George Vining defied the cabal on the stage; and, at last, some fellows in the gallery, shaking off their amazement at

asserted as incontrovertible, that 'It is Never too Late to Mend' failed to win enthusiasm at the outset. This Charles Reade's arithmetic alone goes far towards disproving. 'Sera Nunquam' not only commanded success, but at once entered into the programme of stock companies; and to this hour if a manager, be he London or provincial, colonial or American, happens to be in difficulties, he falls back on this drama as a sure and certain draw. It became, moreover, from the date of its initial performance at the Princess's Theatre, a second fellowship to its author, a steady source of income. Rarely did a week pass without a cheque, larger or less, arriving on account

"2nd. There are scenes which injure dramatically others which follow.

"3rd. There are two characters you are fond of (I suppose), but can never be played. I mean Jacky and the Jew.

"4th. The dialogue wants weeding. It is more in weight than actors—as they breed them now—can carry.

"Total. If you want to make a success with this drama, you must consent to a depleting process—to which Shylock's single lb. of flesh must be a mild transaction.

"Have you the courage to undergo the operation? I'm afraid you have not.

"Ever yours,

"DION BOUCICAULT."

of the representations of this play. Now it was from Manchester, Liverpool, Glasgow, or Leeds; now from Mr. Dampier at Melbourne, or Wagga-wagga; now from the Cape, from Canada, from India.

It won its way, nevertheless, to universal favour by stages, if rapid ones. Two provincial revivals deserve especial mention—at Birmingham, and at Liverpool.

The great metropolis of the Midlands welcomed it with a sympathy most creditable to its reputation for progress and humanity. But for the iron men of that iron city the brutal Austin might have done myriads to death within their gaol. It was Birmingham, that Birmingham whose religious prophet was the noble Angel James, and whose political mouth-piece was equally honest John Bright, which raised the cry. And when Birmingham utters, the world must perforce listen.

“Painful as the incidents, delineated with so much force, skill, pathos, and dramatic power are,” wrote an able publicist to a Birmingham paper, “they are by no means equal to the stern facts upon which the dramatist has based his tragic scenes. The

dismal history was inscribed on our local record, and is probably well-nigh forgotten by those who were living at that time. * * *

"On the 29th October, 1849, the gaol (of Birmingham) was opened, Captain Mackonochie being appointed governor. He had been superintendent at Norfolk Island, and introduced 'the mark system,' under which no prisoner was *entitled* to any other food than bread and water, but might earn an improved dietary, together with other indulgences and rewards, in proportion to the numbered marks he should obtain. This system the Captain desired to introduce into Birmingham gaol. * *

"The beneficial system was not allowed to continue in operation for any length of time. In March, 1850, the office of principal warder became vacant, and Lieut. Austin was appointed. From the day Austin entered he seems to have aimed at undermining the authority of the governor. Quarrels arose. Austin jesuitically sent in his resignation. It was not accepted, and shortly after Captain M. was deprived of his appointment, * * * and on October 21, 1851, Austin was appointed governor. The humane system, and

the generally mild treatment to which prisoners had been subjected, were superseded by others of harshness and cruelty. Between Nov. '51 and April '53, there were no less than twelve attempts at suicide, and three in which the unfortunate prisoners succeeded in destroying their lives. A blue book is full of harrowing details, such as make one shudder. Many might be cited, but I shall be able only to find room for one. This is that of the boy Andrews, which serves as the model of 'Josephs,' the main difference being that Andrews was driven to suicide, while in the drama the boy Josephs dies in the arms of the chaplain. Edward Andrews, a boy of fifteen years of age, was committed, March 28, 1853, for stealing four pounds of beef, for three months. The chaplain described him as 'quiet, mild, docile;' the governor said he was of a 'sullen and dogged disposition.' On March 30 he was put to work the crank; one of the witnesses deposed that, 'to accomplish the 10,000 revolutions necessary for a day's work, a boy would exert force equal to one-fourth of an ordinary draught horse.' He failed to perform his task on the 30th and 31st. *On both*

these days he was fed on bread and water only, not receiving any food whatever until night! 'His food seldom exceeded bread and water,' and on April 17 he was put into the punishment jacket, where the arms were crossed on the breast and tied together, motion being impossible. In addition to the jacket a stiff leather stock was fastened tightly round the neck, and the prisoner was strapped in a standing position to the walls of his cell. On the 19th he was again strapped for four hours; on that occasion the chaplain was attracted to his cell by shrieks of 'murder'; on going there he found the poor lad suffering great bodily pain in his arms, chest, and neck, crying and wailing most piteously. The chaplain found that the stock was fastened so tightly that he could not insert his finger between it and the poor boy's neck. On the 22nd and 24th he was again strapped. On this occasion a bucket of water was thrown over him, and he was seen standing with one sock and one bare foot on the wet stone floor of his cell. On April 26, and 27, he was deprived of his bed from 5.30 p.m. to 10 p.m. On the evening of the latter day, as the watch

was taking the bed to the cell, he found him hanging—dead.”

Austin was indicted at Warwick, convicted, and—such is the farce of English justice—sentenced to three months imprisonment!

“If,” concludes the writer, “any one should doubt the abhorrence of Birmingham people to such horrible inhumanities, let him witness the performance of the drama. He will then know by the uncontrollable sobs of the audience at the simulated sufferings of the victims, and by the murmurs of execration with which the representative of the wicked governor is greeted, how utterly Birmingham despises wrong-doing and tyranny, and how entirely its people compassionate the victims of cruelty and oppression.”

Liverpool was, perhaps, less profoundly stirred than Birmingham, but its splendid amphitheatre was packed to the ceiling. The press, notwithstanding, elected to pose as censor. ‘The Daily Post,’ for instance, considered the play “burdened with a didactic purpose. The presentment of mere physical pain to enforce a specific doctrine, whose soundness is to be determined by the understanding, is alike false

in art, and false in logic. A clinical lecture may be a very proper means of combating an error of medical practice, but its delivery on the stage, in the presence of a patient carefully simulating the throes of tetanus, would rightly be esteemed horrible in itself, and entirely out of place."

Suffice it, that if that was the bright idea of Liverpudlian hypercriticism, it failed to influence Liverpool.*

Did space permit, we should desire much to chronicle the numerous revivals of this celebrated drama in London and the provinces, if indeed revival be not a misnomer for that which, in one quarter or another, is perpetually running. We must content ourselves with calling attention to a circumstance in connection with it, which its author would have

* Martin Farquhar Tupper—"a man," *selon* Charles Reade, "unreasonably pitched into"—wrote thus: "I desire to congratulate you heartily on having made popular so good and true a *refrain* as 'It is Never too Late to Mend.' Despair of good is the great and evil antagonist, which, so long as there is Life and Hope, it is worth any MAN'S while to try and conquer. And you possibly may have done more good by your acted morals at the Princess's than many bishops in many cathedrals. Perge, prosper."

been the first to place in bold relief. We refer to the splendid support accorded the dramatist by his leading actors. It would be unfair to Charles Reade to affirm that Mr. Henry Neville created the character of Tom Robinson. He did none the less—all that a consummate actor could do for a consummate author. He gave Tom Robinson flesh and blood, soul and sinew; and when, later in the day, Mr. Charles Warner succeeded to his *rôle*, he too brought histrionic qualities, which entranced Charles Reade. "The dog is so picturesque!" was his terse eulogium of the other Charles.* Nor must we omit Mr. Calhaem, who seemed to have adopted as his ideal the missing link of the nebulous agnostics, and to have called into existence in his proper

* The following extract from the author's diary, dated Jan. 18, 1879, exhibits his appreciation of Mr. Charles Warner: "Sinclair (George Fielding) and Rose Leclercq (Susan) do not act up to Warner in Act 1. They let the play drop by their sluggishness and want of all genuine excitement in these particular scenes. But of course they appear tamer by the side of the exuberant Warner. However, when a leading performer sets the tune in so bright a key, there is but one way—the others must act up to him, or the whole thing goes to pot, and the audience only attends when the earnest man is on.

person that impossible paradox, the fusion of parallel species.

It is strange to reflect that there are Warners, and Nevilles, and Calhaems unborn; destined, none the less, to speak the words that Charles Reade thought and wrote, and enact the scenes he stage-managed with such rare skill. The curtain will not fall for the last time on thrilling 'Sera Nunquam,' until our English tongue has gone the way of Sanscrit, and the English passion for righteousness has been merged in the lubricity of the wolf and the jackal. And then—if ever that comes—the planet, like other ephemeral things, will no longer be worth preserving.

CHAPTER IX.

THREE NOVELS AND THREE PLAYS.

CHARLES READE's least flattering censors, while generally sparing their praise, have always pointed to one among his works as being in every respect superior to the rest. In 'Peg Woffington' he was accused of staginess; in 'Christie Johnstone,' save the mark, of deficient imagination; in 'It is Never too Late to Mend,' and 'Hard Cash,' of didactic pedantry; in 'White Lies' of plagiarism. He was now to produce a novel which should escape these several strictures, yet expose him to assailants of a different kidney and a less critical mettle. The book, in fact, for once satisfied the most exacting among the republic of literati, while it converted into enemies a section of his warmest admirers outside that charmed circle.

We shall perhaps meet the equity of the case in venturing to suggest, that if only the honest objectors to 'Griffith Gaunt' on either side the Atlantic could have realized its true purport as clearly as the men of letters gauged its artistic merit, there would have arisen but one chorus, and that of praise. Enough that its author, placed on the defensive, delivered a vehement rejoinder in the *brochure*, entitled 'The Prurient Prude,' which forms one of the more amusing items of 'Readiana.' Being, as he believed himself to be, free *in foro conscientiaë*, he was quite capable of answering his detractors; and we feel ourselves in consequence totally relieved from the slightest obligation of constituting ourselves his apologists. He has spoken for himself.

At the same time it is but just to his memory, and above all, to his fair fame, to place on record what evidence we possess on his side. In handling a problem in morals—the *motif* of this book—a writer lays himself inevitably open to the charge of having drawn a veil which ought never to be lifted. Such would be the impulsive, impatient sentiment of many good men. Yet others, and minds

of a more philosophical temperament, would naturally view the author from a different standpoint. Among such, we may mention, with the especial reverence due to a poet, Mr. Edwin Arnold, C.S.I., who wrote thus from the office of 'The Daily Telegraph':

"MY DEAR MR. READE:

"I am proud to be summoned by you to stand forward for your admirable book—'Griffith Gaunt.' What I wrote—in the notice to which you allude so kindly—is what I think, and what I am ready to repeat anywhere, if my friends here don't object to the publication of my name. As I confess to my printed opinion, you can subpoena me in spite of them, however. I have been sickened to see and hear the things vented against your noble piece of work; I found in it what, let me say, I always find in you, a sincere and loyal love of that which renders beauty beautiful and manhood best. I found in it Nature, too, who does not read the weekly journals enough to forget why Moses wrote the Decalogue, nor what reason She gave him first of all to do it. I am no novel reader, and in

morals they call me a Puritan—but I admire and marvel at your exquisite and most healthy and excellent story, which teaches the force of a true love over an unspiritual temperament, and paints a Lady that is indeed every inch a Lady. To be brief, I lent the book to my sister when I had read it; and will defend it as an enrichment of the best English Literature, with hearty good will, at any place and time.

“Yours truly, and, for the Book, gratefully,

“EDWIN ARNOLD.

“C. READE, Esq.”

So far as concerned this country the book met with but few outward expressions of disfavour. It may be said, without exaggeration, to have floated ‘The Argosy.’ It stormed the almost impregnable citadel of criticism. In respect of imagination, sustained interest, variety and vigour of incident, and above all, of situation, it fulfilled all, and more than all, the conditions of an ideal novel. The characters lived and moved, and the dialogue—as might be inferred without the saying—was terse and epigrammatic; perhaps we may add

as an additional encomium, rigorously true to nature. No one could grumble except in regard of the *motif*; and, as it happened, the severer censors were found, not in Exeter Hall, but in the United States.

There was a print, affected by Brother Jonathan, bearing the romantic title, 'The Round Table.' This organ of moral perfection elected to regard 'Griffith Gaunt' as of the nature of a snake in the grass, and said as much, or rather, to be strictly accurate, a good deal more. Charles Reade rejoined with his normal pulverizing fury, and not content with having crushed his butterfly with a brick-bat, had recourse to legal proceedings. Here he was less triumphant. In 'The States' a verdict is said to depend on your ability to procure a judge, and having secured that vantage, to attract the sympathies of a jury. The former of these requirements could be met by the dodgery of your American legal representative; the latter was a physical impossibility. The equity which decided *The Alabama claims*, against England and our colossal Cockburn, in the teeth of the evidence, may be taken as the measure of jurisprudence which obtains in

an inchoate community dominated by democratic license. It was in vain for any limb of the law, be he Cicero or Demosthenes, to attempt to establish a libel when the plaintiff was a Britisher. The jury could not find directly for the defendants, but they did so in effect by awarding Charles Reade damages to the extent of six cents.

The author smarted, but shrugged his shoulders. His mind was not cast in the mould which would condemn the cream of a great nation because of the sourness of its skim-milk. We are able to place on record the fact, that this verdict, which in his own country would have sent him *in celeres iambo furentem*, never changed his opinion of America and her refined sons and daughters. He was gratified when Americans paid him the compliment of courting his acquaintance. He never lost an opportunity of cultivating American ladies and gentlemen, and of displaying his preference for all things American. When the Harvard crew came over to row against Oxford, he offered them hospitality; and has preserved among his collection of choice letters one from Loring, their stroke. He corre-

sponded with Dr. Russell Lowell, and boasted the acquaintance of Reverdy Johnson, General Sickles, and Artemus Ward. Among his numerous American friends may be especially named his kinsman, General Meredith Read, who represented the United States at the Court of Athens, and Mr. Howse, now the editor of a paper at Yokohama. But for *mal de mer* he would have crossed to the other side; and, once there, might have prolonged his visit almost indefinitely. To this excellent feeling Americans themselves have readily testified—notably Mrs. Fields, wife of the eminent publisher, a lady whose recollections of Charles Reade evince both the quality of genuine friendship and the tenderness of womanhood.

‘Griffith Gaunt’ was the culminating point of Charles Reade’s literary career. He had paid his debts, saved a handsome sum, earned reputation both as a novelist and dramatist, while his Fellowship at Magdalen was now yielding a dividend exceeding £500 a year. He resolved accordingly to provide himself a permanent home; and after some few *contretemps* and changes settled finally at Albert Gate.

His residence has been described by himself in 'A Terrible Temptation,' and by at least a score of others. It was a Georgian house, facing Sloane Street on the south, and on the north the park. The rooms were cramped, as also the hall and staircase, but he diminished this inconvenience by throwing out a large room at the back—his sanctum. There he wrote and received visitors, at times entertained—this mainly for the delectation of Mrs. Seymour, for he was not convivial and not gregarious—and passed long solitary hours with his menagerie, his dogs, his hares, his gazelle, and other fauna. The old Ipsden craze for killing, the hereditary instinct of a sporting race, quite deserted him. He had learnt to reverence the great gift of life, and had he lived longer, might have attacked the callous vivisectors, whom he always spoke of with the loathing inspired by supreme black-guardism.

He said afterwards, that the years spent at Albert Gate were the happiest of his life. The struggle for existence and fame was over. Mrs. Seymour, who had begun as his literary partner, had grown to be his devoted friend,

and it is no reflection on either to admit that they were deeply attached to each other. This lady, who was as sharp as a needle at driving a bargain, in private life seemed possessed by a ceaseless desire to do good. She sent small sums anonymously to struggling curates. She helped largely members of her own profession, who chanced to be out of employ or in difficulties. She was a woman of prejudices, but by no means of narrow sympathies. It would be flattering her memory were we to hint, that she possessed the smallest scintilla of that sort of genius which goes to make a good housewife. Most people would have defined the *menage* at Albert Gate as splendidly uncomfortable; but it happened that Charles Reade was of all human beings both the most untidy and the least observant, so that relatively to his comfort the huggermugger ways of the theatrical lady signified less than little. He lived his own life, and in his own fashion.

His rule was to work from nine to three. Interruptions may have deducted from these six hours an average of two, but when pressed he would work on till four, and not seldom in the evening. At a guess we may put his total

of labour at not less than five hours a day, but of this at least one hour was expended in making cuttings from newspapers and magazines for his "invaluable" notebooks, as he termed them. 'The World' remarked, with singular force and generosity, on his preposterous delusion that he was destitute of imagination. It was this disbelief in himself which caused him to accumulate masses of police evidence, and other material, never, happily for his reputation, to be utilized. The dread of missing some good thing caused him to waste at least three hundred hours per annum on scissors-and-paste work, so that eventually, when he came to catalogue and classify all this congeries of information, the headings alone covered twelve pages of printed matter in double columns. The matter itself was stored in guard-books and digests, and is mostly of the sort specially adapted to anecdotal journalism—'Tit-bits,' etc.

Literature, unlike every other avocation, developes into an ineradicable habit. The schoolmaster, the politician, the government clerk, soldier, sailor, parson, merchant, doctor, tradesman and artisan, all crave for their holi-

day. The writer alone holds by force of habit to the rule, "*Nulla dies sine linea*." We who remember Charles Reade as the man of leisure, whose *ergon* was amusement, can but note the contrast between different periods of his life. It is a fact that he laboured most sedulously when labour itself was a matter of option.

At the same time it must be admitted, that there were moments when he seemed to require a spur. It was perhaps the languor, after so marked a success as 'Griffith Gaunt,' that induced him to enter into collaboration with a warm personal friend, whom he esteemed highly as an artist, Mr. Dion Boucicault.

The result was rated by the press as rather *rococo*. 'Foul Play' is not merely dramatic but histrionic, and might appropriately have been termed 'The New Robinson Crusoe.' It is a capital story, none the less so because it outrages probability; and whatever merit it possesses, Charles Reade always readily accorded to his literary colleague. "I agree with you," he says, as though criticizing his friend, rather than the book, "'Foul Play' is very sharp and good. It was written on the right system. Boucicault produced the

greater part of it in pure dramatic dialogue, which makes an excellent back-bone for me." Still, he adds—the book being still in progress—"my work worries and discourages me; but somehow when it comes out in print it seems all right. I am in the vein now."

The press, however, began to laugh. Mr. Burnand parodied the story in 'Punch,' under the style of 'Chicken-hazard,' and Charles Reade writhed under the very good-humoured satire. He called it indignantly desecration of a work of art, and could not bring himself to join in the laugh. In vain did the writer of these lines assure him that chaff is a delicate form of flattery, and that the rollicking fun of 'Chicken-hazard' was never intended to detract from his reputation. He was hurt, far more so than when they styled two of his works immoral; and perhaps this feeling was all the more unreasonable because, on the hypothesis that the travestie designed to hold the book up to contempt, the individual actually affected was its originator, Mr. Boucicault, and not its embellisher, Charles Reade.

That, however, was by no means the end of his trouble. 'The Pall Mall Gazette' wrote a

critique on the serial, suggesting that the story was nothing more than an elaboration of a French play, '*La portefeuille rouge*.' This was news. In a letter from The Palatine Hotel, Manchester, he earnestly requests Mrs. Seymour to obtain, without a moment's delay, a copy of the above play, intimating his ignorance of the author. In fine, whether the allegation was verified, or the reverse, Charles Reade individually was innocent of plagiarism.

'Foul Play' was subsequently dramatized—in spite of a hint from a leading actress that "she could not think how they were going to do it"—and its initial performance at Leeds seems to have been very gratifying to Charles Reade. This is his description of the event: "'Foul Play' came out last night. They began with their usual judgment, half-an-hour after the time, and the waits between the acts were longer, by the watch, than the acts.

"With all these drawbacks it was an undeniable success; and may, I think, work up to a great success.

"The best played parts were Helen, Joe Wylie, and Nancy Rouse. Coleman stronger than anybody in places; but too slow and

ponderous. Scenes good as a whole. For once the performance has only suggested *one* cut.

“You will be pleased to hear that the first call was for me. I was rather reluctant to bow, before an actor had received ovation. But Coleman came and made me, and certainly I was never received with the sort of enthusiasm. Some of the men stood up, and the ladies waved their handkerchiefs to me all over the house. I thought I was in France.”

In 1868 ‘Griffith Gaunt,’ in a dramatic form, appeared before a Manchester audience, with *éclat*; and it remains on record that, had its author returned in 1884 from the south of France to live, instead of to die, he would have revived this drama in London under the auspices of Mr. John Coleman. That was not to be; but the fact affords evidence of a firm belief in the dramatic quality of the most intense of all his narratives.

This was followed in the succeeding year by the adaptation of Lord Tennyson’s pathetic idyll ‘Dora,’ for the Adelphi theatre. The vicissitudes of the drama are proverbial, nevertheless the ill-luck of ‘Dora’ may fairly be styled

unique. Never before had a piece been wrecked owing to defective scenic accessories. There is but one fatal step even from the sublimity of our ethereal laureate to the painfully ridiculous, and this was achieved by—to be frank—poor Mrs. Seymour, who, being cockney bred, could hardly realize the attributes of a corn-field. Suffice it that when the farmer of the play pointed to his acres of golden grain, which consisted of American cloth, the audience was convulsed. ‘*Risum teneatis, amici?*’ was passed from the lips of critic to critic, and ‘Dora’ collapsed.

It was a bitter pill for Charles Reade. He had not been accustomed to failure, and moreover had lavished labour to render his adaptation worthy of the immortal poet whose theme he availed himself of. He registered then and there a vow that some day he would give the drama a second chance, and he kept it.

In 1870 his good friend, Mr. Smith, offered him a place in the ‘Cornhill Magazine,’ and he felt in consequence put on his mettle to produce another *magnum opus*, the parallel, if so it might be, of ‘*Sera Nunquam*.’ During the

progress of 'A good Fight,'—about the year 1859,—a lady in indigent circumstances, residing then at Sheffield, had appealed to him for aid, and not in vain. He begged her in return to furnish him with all the material she could obtain, relative to the action of the trades' unions in terrorizing workmen. She replied that she could glean no facts whatsoever, and this, strange to say, though she was offered a handsome rate of pay, and was also in wretched circumstances. Charles Reade let her down with the epithet "idiot," and turned to other sources for the information he sought. Probably, from 1859 to 1869, he had been steadily collecting material for the book he was about to write. Anyhow, recent events helped him, and he had but to make some personal investigations in order to possess the framework of a strong story.

He did so. What is more, he might have regretted his ambition *tractare serpentes*, since, in plain English, he risked his life. The assassins were so infuriated by his picture of themselves and their dark deeds, that they actually proposed to add him to the number of their victims, and sent him formal notice

to that effect. Whether they thought better of it, or whether as they read on they perceived that the author was even less a champion of the tyranny of capital, than of the tyranny of labour, and so had the wit to avoid striking a friend in mistake for a foe, we know not. Suffice it that the *brutum fulmen* did no more evil than cause a brave and honest soul many sleepless nights, and also exacerbate his whole nature against the proletariat.

"What," cried he to his niece, "do you believe in the working-men?"

"Don't you?" was the halting inquiry of the lady.

"Nasty beasts!" was the scornful rejoinder.

It was their own fault. In his passion for justice, for equal laws and equal rights, Charles Reade was a democrat. But he was also a gentleman *pur sang*, and when blackguardism proposed to have his blood for no other reason than because he had borne testimony on behalf of righteousness, he turned against it, as against a reptile whose heart was as black as its hands.

Yet he had gone down to Sheffield, and other manufacturing centres, with a mind impartial and open to conviction. He did not hesitate

to fix blame on the masters where he deemed it due; and hence expected that either side would recognize the judicial attitude of a writer who had as little liking for the brutality of plutocracy as for the brutality of rattening. To demonstrate that he formed his conclusions on the actual scene, we append quotations from two letters:

First from 4, Handsfield Road, Sheffield.

"I saw Broadhead yesterday, and indeed was in his bar-parlour for nearly an hour. Noted his head, face, conversation; but of course we never touched the particular subject in which he is distinguished."

Secondly, from 332, Oxford Road, Manchester:

"Your letter was a great relief to me. Thank goodness, that Irish fiend (a bibulous cook; Mrs. Seymour had a *penchant* for Irish servants) is out, and a Saxon in.

"Yesterday I received several men who had been beaten, injured, shot by the Unions; and in the evening a detective, the richest fellow in the world. Oh for a shorthand writer, to record the things I heard! Seriously, were I Dickens, it would pay me well to take a

shorthand writer everywhere. I am getting anecdotes and racy dicta.

"But the worst is, I don't succeed in finding Thomas Wilde, which was my great object in coming here. Of course I shall stick to it till the last; but I cannot consent to spend another week in Manchester, a place I hate. I would rather go, and come back to find Wilde is found. How I wished you!" "That's with me yesterday—what a chance I to give you to give up!"

Shortly after the story are to look out weigh in the 'Cornhill' in the shape of seems to have invited which will suit us—and Collins' criticism. If it the go-by in that should almost be ten

reverenced the plot-versed, as in your plot—as profoundly as Jackmakers, just touched and humourist. That the story running on again, yet it may noting-up of the saw-grinding whereas he and all the incidents which follow, friendship, his additional advantage, that Henry had ripened over again with the brickmakers see him," has already done with the cutlers.

to Mrs. to other points: 1. Hurry the story illness, possible) to Henry's proposal to Grace to

from his knowledge of what the brickmakers will certainly do. I should make him put this forcibly in dialogue with Henry—and I should make Henry feel, *exactly what the reader will feel*, immeasurable disgust at this repetition of tyranny, outrage, and murder. ‘What! Am I to go through it all again with the brickmakers? *More* conspiracies, explosions, mutilations, and deaths?’ ‘That’s the prospect, Mr. Little!’ ‘Am *I* to give up my inventions; and are *You* to give up your profits?’ ‘No; we are to look out for a ready-made article in the shape of an empty building which will suit us—and give the brickmakers the go-by in that way.’

“The building is formed, as in your plot—and there are the brickmakers, just touched and dismissed, and the story running on again, with the selling-up of the saw-grinding machinery, and all the incidents which follow,—with this additional advantage, that Henry does not do over again with the brickmakers what he has already done with the cutlers.

“As to other points: 1. Hurry the story (if possible) to Henry’s proposal to Grace to

marry him, and go away with him, and to Grace's refusal. You want that strong point, and that definite result, after keeping the suspended interest so long vibrating backwards and forwards between Grace's two lovers.

"2. I doubt a *second* blowing up with gunpowder. Can the necessary results be arrived at in no other way? Can it not be done by a pre-arranged escape of gas, for instance? Or by some other explosive, or destructive agent?

Query?

This so far is no doubt already in your plan — Mr. Raby having alluded to restoring the desecrated building.

"The scenes in the ruined church are so admirable and original, that I want the church to play an important part in the story. Would it be possible to make Mr. Raby repair and reconsecrate it for public worship? Then to make the marriage of Grace and Coventry take place in it. And then to have the marriage invalidated by some informality in the consecration, or in the registration for marriages, of the newly-restored church?

"I don't know whether such an event as this would be legally possible; or whether, if it

could be possible, you could harmonize my idea with your notion of the uncertificated clergyman?

"But it seems to me a good point to make the old church, in which Henry has worked and suffered for Grace, the retributive agent in defeating Coventry, and uniting Henry to the woman whom he loves.

"The *first* marriage celebrated in the church might be the marriage of Coventry and Grace, and so all difficulty about the marriages of other couples might be avoided.

"Or, perhaps, you already mean to end the story with the marriage of Henry and Grace in the restored old church? Anyhow I, as reader, certify the church, to be 'an interesting character.'"

The whole of this is pasted in Charles Reade's volume of invaluable letters, with the aside, "These are remarks by my friend Wilkie, made at the 10th, or December No., of my story, 'Put Yourself in His Place,' then running in the 'Cornhill Magazine.' I was so fortunate as to please him at last."

The curious reader is invited to take up

the book from the point named, and contrast the actual elaboration of the plot with that here suggested by Mr. Wilkie Collins. It seems almost unfortunate that the two masters of fiction did not lay their heads together and work it out—this without disrespect to the actual author, who certainly kept the interest alive up to the last page.

Following the precedent of 'Foul Play,' Charles Reade dramatized his novel promptly. It was a genuine drama, and yet he complained, almost peevishly, as he laboured upon it in his College rooms, that it did not dramatize easily. It was a doctrine of his, that to write a novel may be possible for any one of average intelligence and some artistic invention, whereas to write a play—that would *play*—was an evidence of genius, not perhaps inevitably of the highest order, but always of a quality transcending mere talent. Pushed to its logical conclusion, his theory would have reacted rather unpleasantly on himself; enough that, like ambidexterity, it was one among the many paradoxes he cherished as axioms.

Under the title 'Free Labour,' the play

made its appearance on May 30, 1870, *before* the story had run its course in the 'Cornhill Magazine.' 'The Times' commenced a sympathetic notice with the somewhat startling compliment: "Mr. Reade is as clever as he is crotchety." That was perhaps rather irrelevant, a text hardly appropriate to Jupiter's homily. As a matter of fact, Mr. Reade produced his play in a theatre consecrated to melodrama of the most realistic type, and he did so with genuine stage effects. Jupiter itself was obliged to admit that Mr. Henry Neville, who played the part of Harry Little with characteristic force and finish, did "actually forge *real* edge tools, on a *real* anvil, with a *real* hammer—and uncommonly well." The burden of the piece fell entirely on this one actor, whose genius really saved it from failure. It was not destined to lasting popularity in the metropolis, but succeeded better with provincial audiences, and especially in Birmingham and Sheffield, where the theme was sufficiently familiar.

The subjoined pair of *billets doux* were preserved by Charles Reade among his literary curiosities:

25th May, 1870.

"B. WEBSTER, ESQ.

"SIR, You are about to produce, at the Royal Adelphi theatre, Mr. Reade's novel of 'Put Yourself in His Place,' under the name of 'Free Labour.' Mr. Reade's novel is a gross outrage on trades' unions. He knows no more about trades' unions than he does about the patent office, which he attempts to describe in his work. I have every reason to believe that the play will be cried down on the first night of its representation.

"I am, Sir, yours obedient,

"AN AMALGAMATED ENGINEER."

"DEAR SIR,

"'Truth copies fiction of a certain order.' With regard to your bill with the above heading, I heard it asserted by a printer (who has what is called an 'Open House,' *i. e.* employs both unionists and non-unionists) that the recent outrage, reported in 'The Echo,' was the result of what had been seen on the Adelphi stage. I think you ought to hear these things, because it shows the perversity of people.

"G. H. G."

We cannot conclude this chapter better than by appending the *verba verberrima* of the leading actor, whose acknowledgment of a keepsake presented him by the dramatist he had served so well will strike most minds, as it strikes us, as being indicative of a warmth of heart, which perhaps may go far towards accounting for the prolonged success of his histrionic career.

"*Olympic Theatre, June 6, 1871.*

"MY VERY DEAR READE,

"I have no words hearty enough to express my delight and gratitude for the splendid compliment you have been good enough to pay me. I am overwhelmed—I don't know what to say—thanks are commonplace, and my heart is boiling over with gushing sentiments, which perhaps would not look well on paper, and could but feebly express my *true* feelings. I am *proud* indeed, and shall ever be, of your *noble* present, and *flattering* inscription. The association of my name with yours is one of the most gratifying circumstances of my life. I have always had intense admiration for you—true friend, noble,

kind-hearted gentleman—with words of fire for all things false and base. Believe me, your kindness is thoroughly appreciated—and with my heart's best thanks,

“I am always,

“Yours faithfully,

“HENRY G. NEVILLE.”

The writer will, we sincerely trust, pardon the inclusion of this letter among others that embellish our pages. It was one which the recipient valued so highly that he preserved, not merely the letter itself, but—as he did in the case of Charles Dickens—the envelope also. This tribute was not, we may add, presented especially on account of Mr. Neville's impersonation of Harry Little, but rather because of a close association with other leading characters, such as Tom Robinson and Robert Penfold, where the author was deeply indebted to the actor. We have ventured to print it, because it bears testimony in simple, yet ardent language, to the exalted motives which invariably actuated Charles Reade, and ever raised him far above the level of theatrical money-grubbers.

THREE NOVELS AND THREE PLAYS. 207

"If," said our author on one occasion to a querulous manager, "you had wished for a play to please the public, you should not have asked me to write for you,"—in other words he never deviated from his sense of art and right to court a cheer. Let us say, in Mr. Neville's own speaking language, his pen issued "words of fire for all things false and base."

CHAPTER X.

IDEAL JOURNALISM.

THREE novels dealing with social topics had already invested their author with a new character. He was an artist, perhaps primarily so, for, unlike Disraeli, he did not utilize fiction as a medium for promulgating political doctrine. But he was also stamped as a social reformer of the most thorough sort, and people with a grievance sought him out from all quarters. He had set a very big ball rolling—should he follow it up?

He thought seriously of so doing, in his own fashion of course, for he was nothing if not individual. To this end he proposed to run a magazine, which should comprise with the solidity of the *Nineteenth Century*, *Contemporary*, and *Fortnightly*, something of the slaughtering quality of Mr. Labouchere's

'Truth;' but to be rigidly non-political. The project never assumed a concrete form. He discovered that to float a magazine costs several thousand pounds, all of which may be lost, should either the public or the advertisers disapprove. Mrs. Seymour at his elbow cautioned him. Inclination, moreover, prompted him rather to lose on his plays than on social idiosyncrasies. Hence the nebular magazine began and ended with a prologue, which, as reflecting the mind of its author, *de omnibus reipublicæ rebus*, we append.

It is headed :

"THE SITUATION.

"The nation is improving, on the whole, in goodness, wisdom, and wealth. Free trade prevails, and England, following tardily the wisdom of Prussia, at last compels low parents to educate their children.

"Drink still ruins the lower orders, and legislators have not the courage to quench it in earnest, or perhaps cannot afford to quench it.

"Taxation is crushing, and in some few

cases, unjust: in others, what sticks to the collector's fingers is so great, and what reaches the public coffers so small, that the tax becomes bad state economy

"In Parliamentary elections we have given perjury and rotten eggs trial upon trial; and at last we are sick of them. The tardiest begin to see that anything may be better, and nothing can be worse, than wholesale perjury, bribery, and riot: so *à priori* reasoning gives way to experience, and the ballot is to have a trial. As no nation has ever given it up after trial, no more will England.

"There is more active religion than ever, and more respectable infidelity. The religious repeat numerous prayers in public, but, as regards their fellow-men, seldom act up to their tenets: nor the infidels down to theirs, but only talk one's hair on end. Some learned divines hover between the two camps: The Right Reverend Father in God, Cocker, whose teeth are longer than Spinoza's, has gnawed away the details of the Pentateuch; the Oxford doctors have nibbled away a good slice of the New Testament. The learned Renan has outdone Socinus; for he has

proved Jesus Christ a *Frenchman*: and that causes a reaction in sturdy Anglo-Saxons, me included.

"The Sovereign has abdicated her highest prerogative; she no longer signs death-warrants: a subject decides whether his fellow-subject is to live or die, which is unconstitutional. So long as the monarchy exists it is the law of England that no head shall fall but under the sign-manual of the Sovereign.—*Blackstone*.

"This is the Sovereign's privilege, but the subject's right; to rob him of it is to abolish monarchy. Consequently, every man who has been hanged of late in England has been killed unconstitutionally—in a word, more or less lynched.

"These excusable homicides are now done privately. Certain shallow men urged on The State the scandal of a public execution, and criminals are now hanged cannily in a corner, without the Queen's sign-manual.

"The deliberate slaughter in cold blood, even of a murderer, can be justified on two grounds combined: rétributive justice, and public terror. This is the only sound theory,

of capital punishment. But subtract publicity, and the act is lowered to clandestine vengeance. Intelligent men, who have seen these justifiable homicides, come away shuddering, and saying to themselves, "we have seen a man's life stolen secretly."

"Our judges, the mouthpieces of law—are still chosen from a band of outlaws—highly respectable ones of course; but so long as a client can, by law, defraud counsel of his fee for service, if he does not take it in advance, and counsel can, by law, take the fee, yet cheat the client out of his services, counsel are outlaws.

"This anomaly of law actually leads to frauds upon the suitor by distinguished counsel on their road to the judgment-seat. The fraud is perpetrated by the influence of the lawyers, because it does not work evenly—the suitor cannot actually defraud them, and they can and do defraud the suitor. The English public is mad to allow this Roman fraud to live in the temple of English law and justice.

"For three mortal months in the year justice is suspended for the convenience of a

clique—justice, which is the breath of every nation's nostrils. The poor silly nation submits to this. Perhaps if, instead of the Long Vacation, it was called 'The Suspension of Justice,' we should not put up with so great an injury, so impudent and ungrateful an insult.

"In the general practice of our law courts much reform has been effected; but not half enough. The law reformers have been lawyers; and no clique, however well disposed, can see one half its own abuses—prejudice and precedent are too strong. Intelligent laymen must also take the broom, or the Augean stable will never be swept. The suitor is too much oppressed and pillaged in our courts; and the whole legal clique is given to forget, that he is the representative in their courts of that great and generous public which supports the whole system of judicature, and pays the judges their princely salaries, and pays those who appoint the judges.

"Legislation—the peers seem to be gradually retiring from it. This is a pity. The House of Commons is an arena of political strife; and quiet salutary measures are not

so welcome there as noisier measures; but, as regards the true welfare of the whole nation, a measure about which the great parties fight with a view to office is often a clique business, and a smaller national measure than one which evaporates for want of piquancy, or is refused a hearing for years, and then passed through pure apathy, not appreciation. I may, therefore, in these pages invite the peers to consider great but peaceful measures, beneficial not to party but only to mankind.

“Many wise laws have passed, and will; a few great defects and errors remain to be corrected. The most flagrant that occur to me all in a moment are:

“1. The want of a sufficient law to detect and punish with fine and imprisonment the adulteration of milk, and the mere diluting of milk. It is an Herodian crime. Indeed it is wholesale slaughter of the community; for the community is principally composed of children, and true milk is their life, watered milk their death. France has for many years detected this crime by science, and punished it by imprisonment; we do neither, and more fools we! Adulteration ought to be attacked

with more rigour; something has been done, but not enough.

“2. The difficulty of ejecting house-tenants who will neither pay nor go is monstrous. Such a tenant is a malefactor, and the legislature has not observed it. If such a malefactor holds a tenement worth only £20 a year, the man he is robbing of the property can go to a police court, and kick the robber out; but if the property is worth £300 a year, then there is no remedy for the victim but the slow and costly process of ejectment, with loss of law costs and six months' rent. In other words, the legislature has looked through a microscope, and seen a small wrong to clear property bigger than a great wrong. Where a little indisputable property is concerned, it sees the real sanctity of property. Where a large indisputable property is concerned, it forgets the real sanctity of property, and glues its eyes on the sanctity of possession, which is a pure illusion; and the larger the property the more disastrous the illusion.

“We still hold to our PENINSULAR MANIA.

“In any part of Europe, except England

proper from the Tweed to Lizard Point, if a man and woman, through pure frailty, or temporary bars to marriage, cohabit and have children, but afterwards repent and marry, their children become legitimate. But here, in this little peninsula, crammed with lawyers, but bare of jurists, the parents can repent, and legitimize themselves, the sinners, but not their children. These last are still picked out and punished without remorse, yet they are the parties who never sinned at all. This peninsular mania will be exposed in these pages by one who has no personal interest in the question, but is justly ashamed of his peninsula, and not to be humbugged by the cant of King John's Barons, nor Queen Victoria's bombastical pettifoggers.

"The wrongs of authors are still bitter, and a disgrace to the legislature.

"Muddleheads still call copyright a monopoly; and cannot, or will not, see it is intellectual property, and has nothing whatever in common with monopoly: and this fatal misuse of language is a main source of the foul injustice to authors at home and abroad. Acting on

this fallacy, the government of 1847 committed one of the most barbarous acts of spoliation and tyranny that ever disgraced the legislature of any country in modern times. It actually pillaged English authors, without warning, of their colonial property. It had no more right to rob us of that property than to take our coats off our backs the moment we land in Quebec.

“Street houses are still a gigantic blunder : they are built with irrational roofs, inaccessible roofs, combustible staircases on the top floor, doors and windows square and hideous, instead of arched and beautiful, plaster ceilings, hidden drains, stifling rooms, deadly cold passages, &c. They are fire-traps, dens of smoke and effluvia ; they are chronic swindles, for they are so built, piped, glazed, and painted, that they must be a constant expense to the holder, and a milch cow to the builder. Buy any other new thing, and you get rid of the maker ; but buy a new house, and you must be always sending for him to grope for his hidden work, and patch his bad work, and clean his abominable casements, and repaint

God Almighty's beautiful woods, to paint which woods at all is but to defile them. (See my letters to the 'Pall Mall Gazette.')"

"The Fine Arts.—England is the paradise of painters. They are honoured more than the artists of the pen. They are paid a great deal more than they are worth, measured by European pictures and prices; but long live these insular and amazing prices, for the painters gain and the nation too. High prices encourage long labour and produce better pictures than low prices do; and good pictures are a national treasure: they cost the nation nothing; for the purchase-money stays at home, and they will be one day exported to the colonies, and bring specie in, though they never took specie out.

"These artists have a double market, the picture and the copyright.

"They are allowed to charge the public a shilling a head for entering their great shop, though the public built it for them, and by entering buy a hundred pictures that otherwise might not be sold or not so well sold. This is without a parallel in Europe.

"Music is highly rewarded in the persons

of many singers and a few fiddlers; but the higher artist, the composer, is vilely paid. To sweeten his substantial wrongs, he is petted by the women, including Her Gracious Majesty, who knights him promiscuously. Like the dramatist, his invention is discouraged by the competition of the stolen music; and this fraud on the foreigner, and discouragement to the native composer, especially of Opera, is the sure fruit of a foul and perfidious clause England, to her deep dishonour, smuggled into the International Copyright Act of 1851. This piece of national folly, and base treachery, was dictated by a playwright or two, who crawled up the backstairs of the House of Commons and earwigged the late Lord Palmerston; it offers a premium, not only on the theft, but on the adulteration of foreign musical compositions. Barbarity added to crime! (See my evidence in the Parliamentary commission, and my fruitless appeal to the honour of the House of Lords—‘The Eighth Commandment.’)

“The fine art of writing is not honoured as it deserves, and as it is honoured in more refined nations.

“Though it is the highest of all the arts, and gains an Englishman the most honour abroad, it is slighted at home by Queen, Lords, and Commons, who, moreover, in this do but echo the brutality of the nation. Of all those gentlemen who sit in the House of Peers, few deserve to sit there better than the late Charles Dickens did. Decompose the House, and you resolve it into a few truly noble names; but the bulk is nothing of that sort: sons, or grandsons, of plebeians who rose to be judges and peers, but rarely to be jurists; the sons, or grandsons, of commonplace men, who got into the Commons by bribing small towns, and sticking to a minister right or wrong. A few old nobles, descended from gallant soldiers; others, like the bold Buccleuch, and the canny Cawmil, descended from robbers and murderers who, we know, deserved the roadside gibbet, but got their neighbours’ lands and the peerage instead. Yet this miscellaneous company, into which a banker was lately drafted, simply and solely for having a lot of money, was too divine an assemblage for Charles Dickens to enter! He was the greatest genius of the

century, the greatest benefactor of his country, the great apostle of sympathy. He found classes glowing with antipathy to each other, and infused a little of his own boundless charity into them. Twenty years before he died the highest honours of the State were his mere due—yet they were never offered him; and the nation, whose darling he was, was insulted by this act, the child of blind cliquism and a sordid, narrow, hoggish and, above all, snobbish estimate of public merit and true glory.

“But this is only a part of a false and porcine estimate. Look into the fine arts themselves, and you will find they are publicly honoured here in strict proportion to their brainlessness.

“The highest title our backward Anglo-Saxon concedes to any fine art is knighthood. Now music is the one art that demands little or no brains; indeed, it is often connected with downright and proverbial silliness; so knighthood is showered on it. Third-rate composers, and second-rate organists—Knighthed!

“To paint well, requires mind; so fewer

good painters are knighted than mediocre musicians.

“To write poetry, philosophy, narrative, fiction, dramatic fiction, immortal history, incorruptible criticism, requires a larger mind and higher soul than to paint well; so knight-hood never comes at all to those diviner arts.

“In other words, where the fine arts are concerned, sensuality, and not mind, distributes the paltry honours of the State, with the discriminating soul that belongs to the Anglo-Saxon hog, young as yet in this branch of civilization.

“A Republic has been openly hinted at as sure to come soon or late, and the ‘Times’ has paved the way for unprejudiced discussion by printing a letter of Mr. Potter’s. A few years ago Potter and his editor would have been indicted for sedition.

“But the feeling of the nation does not run straight that way. Even if it should, the House of Brunswick need not fear; it has its musicians and painters bound by gratitude to defend it; and so supported it will not expect nor need, when the ‘pinch’ comes,

any champion so mean and feeble as the Pen.

“But, to tell the truth, our immediate danger is from what I call A DIRTY OLIGARCHY, *i.e.*, a set of associated mechanics, who regulate their own numbers by terrorism, and so secure a monopoly, and then abuse that monopoly.

“Mr. Potter may prate about a republic, but his lambs are stiff oligarchists; they are also bloody, crafty, cowardly, remorseless tyrants, compared with whom emperors and Cæsars are just and humane, and don’t smell.

“The House of Commons, for obvious reasons, defers to this odoriferous oligarchy steeped in innocent blood; the peers are asleep in *re*, or do not comprehend that there can be an unwashed oligarchy as brutal, barbarous, and dangerous to the nation, as they themselves are charming, inoffensive, and clean: and so this odoriferous oligarchy bids fair to oppress talent and enterprise, drive much productive kind of capital out of the country, and clip the wings of labour down to eight hours a day: finely we shall then compete in manufacture, with nations working ten hours a day, and not too drunk to work

at all on Monday! Give the second horse ten seconds start for the Derby; what does it matter? it is only ten seconds.

"This dirty oligarchy, and not a republic, is England's rock ahead.

"In matters international, nations, led by us, have done a great stroke of wisdom. Many years ago we made good old Chaucer's prophecy without exactly intending it, and the world has learned a great lesson: it sees that one nation works best in glass, another in silk, another in wood, another in gold, another in wool and iron and so on; and no nation is superior in many things. Thus national vanity—the silliest of all vanities—is corrected, and talent interchanged, and nations can easily profit by each other.

"But a greater and harder lesson remains to be taught systematically. The wisdom of the mind is also distributed among nations as equally as mechanical skill: no nation realizes this; yet it is so; and would be seen in an hour if the wisest laws and the wisest customs of each nation could only be brought into one building, and presented to the senses. That unfortunately cannot be. This

impalpable wisdom can only be shown on paper, and not vividly like the national products of industry. Yet, here a periodical will rise above all books, and be a small Crystal Palace of ideas: if lovers of mankind will co-operate with me, and, striving nobly against blinding prejudices, will rise to the occasion, weigh the bits of superior wisdom they have seen in Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, and bring them to a focus in these pages. My own reading in this kind has been long and large; but no man's private stores can build so great a work—a work which, if it prospers, will promote the interchange of that wisdom which is above rubies; will tend towards that world-wide, blessed uniformity of laws in civilized nations, and that great, but, alas, too distant good, the unity of nations.

“A few superior women are pushing themselves into medicine, and have all my sympathy. Others are talking well, but talking only, and blaming men too much, women too little. But it is childish to sit still and howl at men because they are better educated. Are men educated by God? Are

women educated by men? Man is a slightly superior animal, educated by a slightly superior animal. Woman is a somewhat inferior animal, educated by a somewhat inferior animal. This is the double obstacle to their competition. Let women, then, who are truly ambitious for their sex, leave baying the moon and lay the first stone; let them begin to raise the young and their sex by rational education. At present female education is the blind leading the blind: women forget that in many essential things they are savages compared with men, and that before they can run on all four legs in our race-course, they must first walk with all those four legs into the pale of civilization, as we have.

“To touch on those narrower subjects which may be expected of me :—

“I find that Literature, directly or indirectly, owes its sad degradation in England to an excess of anonymous writing; one branch is directly degraded by it, and from a great height. I mean the branch which is blasphemously miscalled ‘criticism.’ I find that anonymous criticasters are often corruptible and scarcely ever scientific in their judgments.

There is scarcely a writer in the island, whose name signed at the bottom of his critique would not rather weaken than strengthen its authority; and this is a terrible phenomenon in any art or science. It arises partly from the want of scientific principles, and still more from the excess of the anonymous. In France this deplorable phenomenon does not exist. The anonymous criticaster is deprived of those two great guides, without which no *class* of men ever yet went straight, reward, and punishment: he is neither punished for dishonesty and blunders, nor rewarded for purity and infallibility. The result is inevitable, since all classes of men are what circumstances make them. We have a shoal of criticasters with little moral and no intellectual principle; they admire in the dead what they dispraise in the living; admire in a Frenchman what they dispraise in an Englishman; approve in their friends what they condemn in their enemies; labour to say smart things, but not to say true things; and are as often wrong as right in their judgment of any new work. This need not be. Literary judgments might be as pure

and as accurate as the decisions of the judges in our courts at Westminster. But this will never be until a few able literary judges sit habitually in daylight, like the judges at Westminster; and, like those judges, cultivate accuracy, apply precedents fairly to new-born works, and go by evidence, not conjecture.

Criticism is a science that does not exist in *esse*, but it does exist in *posse*; and I propose to lay the first stone of that science in these pages.

The feats of that science, which at present only exists in fitful flashes, are not eloquent phrases, nor flippant sneers, nor even witty periods, but *judgments on new-born works, which judgments time confirms*.

International copyright is just and needed to raise the literary character. Any class to be respectable must be well-to-do. No class, except ministers of religion, can be poor and noble. A class without property is a tribe of Bohemians. Copyright is the authors' property; it gives them a stake in the country; and international copyright gives them a stake in other countries, and interests them in keeping the peace. Now anonymous writers in

this respect have an interest opposed to that of mankind. They are always tempted to set nations by the ears, because they are propertyless Bohemians and penmen who fatten on war.

"I shall fight tooth and nail for international copyright and stage-right, and under these heads correct the strange delusions of English legislators and the English public.

"This little enumeration of things that might be better, will, I hope, excuse me for intruding a new periodical into so great a crowd.

"However, I shall not be too hard on the public, nor run by excess of public virtue into the Bankruptcy Court. I know the public taste: it is for exciting and amusing lies, not for truth, justice, and European wisdom. Well, let us compound. I will give you a reasonable dose of lies; only when you have drunk them with the eagerness they do not deserve, come, pray, sip the nobler elixir that is to do you good."

CHAPTER XI.

WISDOM AND FOLLY.

'PUT Yourself in His Place' was Charles Reade's last great novel. Already he had wearied of dramatic narration, and his whole mind seemed focussed on the theatre. His dramas were being played with varying success in the provinces—mostly at his own risk ; and the excitement of theatrical speculation seemed to possess a fatal fascination for him.

It happened, however, that Messrs. Cassell required a serial for their magazine, and the terms they offered attracted him. At the moment their editorial department was being supervised by The Rev. Teignmouth Shore, since then one of the Queen's chaplains, and Mr. John Williams, a former scholar of Trinity College, Oxford, and a first-class man. The Fellow of Magdalen was much gratified to find

the literary management of a great firm in such capable and appreciative hands; and so highly did he esteem Mr. Teignmouth Shore that he preserved a complimentary letter of that gentleman, whereunto he appended the following remarks:

“Rev. T. Shore. Editor of Cassell’s, 1871. This truly amiable and intelligent gentleman is Cassell’s head editor at a liberal salary; and I believe the firm has never regretted the unusual step of making a gentleman controller of their business. Certainly under his rule the firm has made great advances.”

That any novel-writer should have hit on such a theme as that which forms the backbone of ‘A Terrible Temptation,’ and have utilized for its development the columns of a magazine supposed to be largely supported by the simple puritanism of England—this indeed beggars belief. Yet so it was; and the author himself seems to have been at the outset dubious of so perverse an experiment.

Under date Monday, October 30th, 1870, he writes: “I have lately signed with Cassell, and am languidly working on a weekly serial. Have written one number. Rather smart,

I think, but also rather loose. I fear it will offend the mothers of families. Indeed, query will Cassell publish it?

"Yet, is it really wrong to tell the truth soberly—*viz.*: that young men of fortune have all mistresses; and that these are not romantic creatures, but only low, uncultivated women bedizened in fashionable clothes?"

The book has a value of its own, in that it gives the portrait of the author painted by his own hand, and by no means in flattering colours; also, a descriptive account of the same author's sanctum, together with a close analysis of his method of working. The above extract from his diary shows that in intention he was far from being sinister; nevertheless, *littera scripta manet*, and he put a powerful handle into the grasp of his enemies, while his friends were taken aback. It was hoped that the man whose life had been threatened by the Sheffield ratteners; the author, whose grip of social problems was as firm as that of a Roebuck or a John Bright, might have taken his place among the practical social reformers of a reforming age. A great

statesman was reported to have thrown down the book with the angry criticism: "He has wrecked a reputation." The firm of Cassell, Petter, and Galpin felt chagrined, and said as much. The wolves and jackals of the press fell upon him with ferocity. He re-wrote, under pressure, a portion of the serial while yet it was running through the pages of Cassell's Magazine. Love, reverence, gratitude cannot induce us to offer a fuller apology for this, the one real blunder of the author's beneficent career, than that which is implied in his own words—he meant well.

He suffered for his indiscretion, moreover, in pocket as well as otherwise. These are his reflections:

"A successful author! My story, 'A Terrible Temptation,' declined by all the publishers I offered it to. Smith, with compliments, says he is *afraid* to publish it.

"Chapman, who was hot on it, now says nothing. He, or his wife, has read it.

"I foresee that the librarians will all band against it, as usual; and at 57 years of age, plenty of hot water coming. Well, it is one

more fight; that is all, for fight I must, or be crushed entirely. And this is what they call a lucky writer!"

The next sentence, and those following, betray symptoms of penitence:

"Letter to Coleridge, Solicitor-General, reminding him of the promise I made to expunge an intemperate passage in 'It is Never too Late to Mend,' and sending him a copy of the amended book.

"I have actually forgotten whether this, or July 16th, was dear Julia's birthday. Ah, sweet saint! I hope you don't see me, my follies and——! Here is a horrible wish; so much for not being a Christian.

"I am depressed by my inability to find a subject that interests me to write on."

Our American cousins, whose propriety had been shocked by 'Griffith Gaunt,' went simply frantic over 'A Terrible Temptation.' Across the Atlantic, they have a habit of styling a spade a powerfully-epitheted agricultural implement, and Charles Reade was by no means let down gently. He got his deserts, and something also by way of compound interest. For example, 'The Philadelphia

Telegraph' declared "that 'A Terrible Temptation' was written in Mr. Reade's most slang-whanging style." 'The New York Sun' called it "a piece of carrion literature, whose putrescence attracted the keen scent of the publishers, and whose sickening odours, thanks to their enterprise, now pervades the land." 'The Utica Morning Herald' began by dubbing Charles Reade "King among all living novelists," and proceeded promptly to preach revolution on the ground that the king had erred. Nevertheless, it cannot bring itself to be totally disloyal. "The book," it avers, "is none the less great because it is so contemptibly indecent." That, after all, if plain speaking, cannot be dismissed as mere malediction. It gives the author his meed both of praise and blame. 'The New York Tribune,' of all Transatlantic journals the least censorious, summed up our author thus: "His flashing satire reminds one more of the subtle deadliness of an Italian stiletto than of the crushing blows of the Oriental scimitar." Poetical—very.

We forbear to linger over this unfortunate book. To this hour, those authors of lesser

light who have experienced the motions of the green-eyed monster because of Charles Reade's command over fortune, are able to point to it, as to an ugly blot on a fair picture. The people who indite, what an eminent publisher styles, with cruel acerbity, the pork-chop variety of literature, are able to console themselves with the thought that, after all, Charles Reade once dropped somewhere near to their normal level. Enough that, commercially, it was the least profitable of all his works. This is his own confession, "Yesterday I treated with Mr. Frederick Chapman for 'A Terrible Temptation.' He gives me £600 for a 3 vol. edition of 1500 copies. Should this be exhausted, fresh arrangements to be made. This is a pitiable decline on former sales. He gave me £1500 for limited copyright of 'Griffith Gaunt.' Bradbury and Evans gave me £2000 for ditto of 'Foul Play.' The serial in its first form will soon be the only considerable market open to me."

His next novel, 'A Simpleton,' appeared in serial form per 'London Society,' at that time edited by one of the most fascinating of lady novelists, Florence Marryatt. The title was

unattractive; and the author, having finally discarded youthful irregularity as a source of dramatic interest, fell back on one among his many crotchets. It requires genius to invest anything so essentially pragmatical with charm, and this much Charles Reade did.

The book owed not a little to the practical talent and suggestive brain of Mrs. Seymour. She had already, and was partly conscious of it, the seeds of an internal complaint, destined in the course of a very few years to shorten her life, and was inclined to attribute it to the evil effects of tight lacing. Here we have a cue to one of the leading features of the story. Others will be easily surmised from the subjoined letters addressed to her from Magdalen :

"It was quite a grand wedding (his niece) and went off very fairly. The women, unfortunately, were divided into two classes—the idiotic gigglers—the dead silent. A fine day, and I drank my beautiful native air; slept at Ipsden one night.

"At 10.30 drove to Goring station—waited half-an-hour.

"Train to Didcot fifteen minutes.

"At Didcot waited an hour and a half.

"Train to Oxford half-an-hour.

"Reached here on a dismal, discouraging, wet afternoon.

"Fire in small room, which stinks of paint still, so lighted one in north room. Shall go to work *at once*, so pray send me some little material, no matter how rough, every day.

"Jot it down.

"Fling it on paper.

"Scenes.

"Observations.

"Single lines.

"Make a heading 'Rosiana,' of detached simple things for her to say or do.

"Oh dear! I feel rather old to have to work so hard!"

Again:

"Thanks for hint. The ladies, enthusiastic school-fellows, shall quarrel in the auction room, and part for ever.

"But can you not remember any little bit of colour you have seen or heard in auction rooms—any bit of Jew's chaff—any incident?

"If so, send it by return, or it will be too

late, for I shall have passed through that topic, and got to servants and dress.

"I feel miserable at having to write about these things. And yet I know I must. Now or never, I must give a picture of the inexperienced householder's troubles—*e. g.* house agent's lies, repairs, inaccessible roof, tile loose—man goes up and makes two holes for the plumber. Chimney-sweeper takes away the lead and charges 1s. 6d. Mention the pipes. The passing workman knocks the pipes together. Every workman had in to repair begins by destroying, and then goes away and can't be got."

Ever since the Sheffield ratteners thought fit to honour him with a murderous menace, his dislike and distrust of the British workman became more and more rooted. Individual artisans, who happened to be in distress, partook of his bounty, but he vastly preferred to give to other classes. He believed in their dishonesty; and on one occasion when something had gone wrong with one of his London houses, wrote to Mrs. Seymour, "The fact is you and I are much alike. We are a couple of wise fools. Very fit to guide *each*

other, but not able to take care of No. 1, though I for my part have all the inclination."

There he wronged Mrs. Seymour. No daughter of Eve was more shrewd and calculating. None less capable of disbursing a shilling in mistake for elevenpence.

As for the honest proletarian, he did his little best to perpetuate the author's prejudice. When Charles Reade was dying, and doted, with the fondness of a broken heart, on his pets—some pretty Belgian hares—a blackguard, imported to do repairs—because, forsooth, his employer refused to submit to gross extortion—had the heartless barbarity to leave the garden-door open; and the author's favourite hare strayed into the streets to fall a victim, very possibly to this identical ruffian. One can but regret that a myriad-handed class, eminent for such virtues as industry and truthfulness, should be traduced by its exceptions. The warmest friend of labour failed to convince Charles Reade that the samples he had encountered were otherwise than representative and typical.

'A Simpleton' had so fairly exhausted its creator, that Mrs. Seymour despaired of his

attempting another novel. He found himself by no means reviled, but dismissed with a good-tempered laugh. This was little to his taste. His precedent works had received such an amount of attention as was in itself a tribute to their calibre. He flung down his pen.

Mrs. Seymour held her peace, waited till the mood passed; but was none the less surprised to perceive how unready the pen of the ready writer had become. With admirable tact she let well alone for the nonce. He had other fish to fry—to wit, various minor theatrical ventures in London and the provinces, such as ‘Shilly-shally’* and ‘The

* This drama led to a very regrettable dispute between friends and literary comrades. It was an adaptation from Anthony Trollope’s clever story, ‘Ralph the Heir’; and its author being at the time in Australia, the adapter took his consent as a matter of course, intending to offer him half-profits in the theatrical venture. Mr. Trollope, however, fired up at his friend’s French-leave, and delivered himself in a tone of acerbity. Charles Reade apologized, and there the incident should have ended. Unfortunately the piece proved a failure, and this confirmed the unflattering view Mr. Trollope always entertained of Charles Reade’s capacity; while the other, stung by what he regarded as Trollope’s ingratitude, delivered himself of some sneering epithets—of which, perhaps, “mediocre” was the most offensive. Yet in private life each author

Double Marriage,' produced at The Queen's Theatre—not to omit 'The Wandering Heir' in its dramatized form: it appeared originally in 'The Graphic,' as he puts it, "with no great effect," a verdict Mr. Locker would probably hesitate to endorse. For this latter piece he engaged the services of no less an artist than Miss Ellen Terry, in succession to Mrs. John Wood, who made the character of Philippa. It will be remembered that Mr. George Annesley, his brother Compton's partner for many years, represented Charles Reade when he championed M. Maquet. Moreover, a branch of the Annesley family is located in Oxfordshire, so that the author was dealing with a theme in every way congenial, when he seized on the famous Annesley romance. From what we can glean, he expected that it would eclipse the Tichborne case, then dragging its weary length through the courts.

At last the moment arrived when, for the

spoke fraternally of the other, and this although neither appreciated the other's handiwork. Certainly Mr. Trollope, when not in a splenetic vein, could say some very kind and generous things of Charles Reade.

first time during a space of twenty years, the successful author resembled the frozen-out workman in actually having no work to do.

"You want a suggestion," said Mrs. Seymour, "something to spur you."

He yawned. He wanted nothing of the kind. Yet he abhorred idleness. *Nulla dies sine linea*, he had already dubbed "the eleventh commandment."

At last the suggestion came, ab extra, and much more than mere suggestion. He opened up, in consequence, a negotiation, through the writer, with Messrs. Tillotson for a new novel on the theme misogynism; but this came to nothing, and the book eventually appeared—for reasons which need not be stated specifically; suffice it that they were never revealed, even to Messrs. Blackwood—anonymously in the columns of 'Blackwood's Magazine.' There was, however, no mistaking the wand of the magician. Critics, readers, even those who skim and skip, all agreed that 'The Woman-Hater' must be Charles Reade's handiwork. The characters, and the working of the first volume, may have seemed

dissimilar to any he had previously produced. The plot also might have been termed a new departure. But the character of Rhoda Gale M.D., was obviously, unmistakably his—no other hand could have conceived or drawn it.

At last, when the book appeared in volume form, the surmise of a friendly public was verified, and 'The Woman-Hater' bears the name of Charles Reade.

Oddly enough, the lady-doctor, which may be said to have given the hall-mark to the book, was the one feature that exposed it to censure. The first volume ran so smoothly and dramatically, the interest aroused was so intense, that the break caused by the insertion of this pragmatistical character could but be viewed with disfavour. It seemed to give the narrative an ugly twist and disturb its threads. For all that, the book pleased the general reader. It dealt with character and incident, and erred neither in respect of sensationalism nor eroticism. Ina and Zoe were both eulogized, notably in his exhaustive criticism by Mr. Walter Besant.

Nevertheless Charles Reade was dissatisfied. "I will write no more 'Woman-Haters,' he

remarks in his diary, "for the jenny-asses of this nation to refuse to read."

It was while he was engaged on this book that he took up the cudgels on behalf of a certain James Lambert—a hero and a martyr, as he elected to crown him. Across the Tweed there was no small scepticism as to the heroism or martyrdom of Lambert. The Scotch uphold everything national, from thistles to haggis, as being most superior; but they are as hard-headed as clannish, and by no means relish being found fault with. Now the charge preferred against Caledonia stern and wild, and Glasgow in particular, was one of crass indifference to the very qualities a Scotchman holds most in honour. The Scotch excel in bravery and endurance, the leading characteristics of heroes and martyrs. Hence, when a Southron pulled them up short, they felt affronted.

There were, however, exceptions. A priest of the Roman obedience in Scotland sent Charles Reade a mite, and with it so genial a letter as to have been deemed by its recipient worthy a corner of his guard-book. Other perfervid Scots followed suite, while in

England the story of Lambert, as narrated in the columns of the 'Pall Mall Gazette,' tapped the ever-ready purse of our kindly public. It was remarkable that his own countrymen took Charles Reade on trust, whereas the blue bonnets across the border discounted him heavily.

Up till then no one had suspected the novelist of genuine philanthropy. It was presupposed that when he championed prisoners, lunatics, and honest workmen, he merely utilized, with utter insincerity, these social elements for the purpose of agony-piling. Nay, more, he was accused broadly of wilfully exaggerating, of adding carmine to human blood, of doubling the horror of death itself. The world had yet to learn how cruelly it misjudged a vivid and picturesque mind—a mind which never saw as others, and could only express its thoughts in harmony with its own very acute emotions. This story of Lambert may have been in fact—though certainly never in intention—coloured, but if so, it was by a generous and magnanimous pen. It affected its readers very much after the fashion of the prison scenes in '*Sera*

Nunquam'; indeed, as an illustration of that we may cite a letter from Sir Arthur Helps, begging the editor of the 'Pall Mall Gazette' to forward at once a copy to be shown to the Queen.

So much of the ground of the biographer is already occupied by the collection of papers, published under the generic title 'Readiana, that we can only notice in brief some among his more striking letters and essays.

In the 'Daily Telegraph' he broached a theory of ambi-dexterity. On all sound physiological principles he was totally in error, nevertheless no *advocatus diaboli* in the middle ages ever defended a sophism with such consummate skill. Miss Braddon (Mrs. John Maxwell) wrote him a letter with her left hand by way of experiment, and it is legible. One swallow, however, does not make a summer, and after all few of her sex can boast the rare versatility of "Lady Audley." The rest of the world did not so much as essay to impose on the left the functions of the right hand.

In the same journal Charles Reade took up the cudgels on behalf of four condemned

persons. Here his zeal for abstract justice caused him to exhibit an almost painful oblivion as to the hideous moral obliquity—apart from criminality—of the parties whose advocate he voluntarily constituted himself. Justice, however, was his grand passion. He seems to have declined mentally to discuss the question of innocence or guilt, and to have adhered doggedly to the point he raised—*viz.* that the miserable quartette were illegally condemned. His letters were of the sort that could not be gainsayed. Before their appearance it was publicly stated that the law would take its course—albeit strenuous efforts were being made on behalf of the girl, who might have been termed the *causa causans* of all the wrong. Within four hours of the appearance of Charles Reade's final letter, bearing the title "Hang in haste; repent at leisure," the noose was cut, all four prisoners were respited, and—rightly or wrongly—not one was hanged.

Charles Reade's analysis of the Tichborne *cause célèbre* was contributed to an ephemeral paper, styled 'Fact.' It served to clear away the cobwebs spun with persistence rather than

ability by Dr. Kenealy. Both this and the brief he wrote for the Stauntons would seem to demonstrate a capacity for law as well as for litigation. He might have sat on the judicial bench had he devoted his energies to his profession. Is it, however, a matter for regret? Let his country decide. We should have lost 'Triplet,' 'Susan Merton,' 'Christie Johnstone,' 'Margaret of Sevenbergen,' 'Gerard,' 'Ina and Zoe,' 'Coupeau and Tom Robinson.' We should not have gained, for the law, a Lush, still less a Cockburn. Better as it was.

We have seen how, with a design of exploiting the many original ideas wherewith his brain teemed, he at one time thought of speculating in a magazine. This idea abandoned, he varied its form and expanded it on different lines, preserving, however, its original essence. He proposed to himself to adopt, as a vehicle for his great thoughts, some journal with a colossal circulation, having in his eye, probably, that one which was readiest always to give him a place.

"The plan I propose," he writes on Jan. 1st, 1878, "is to make the most of my

interest—a journal; to take and shake the nation, and *make it* write to me; for I have discovered that the only creature who knows *much* and various things is the public.

“I open the year with these designs, but none of that certainty I shall accomplish any one of them which marks our sanguine youth. My contemporaries, and even my juniors, fall daily around, and I observe that nobody calls their deaths untimely. I therefore am due. That is clear, and *vitæ summa brevis spem nos vetat inchoare longam*. . . But then, as I don’t know the hour of my death, why should I lie down and wait for death’s chariot to roll over me! The time is certainly come when I ought not to write foolish, or wicked, or frivolous things for the public; but should I die in the middle of a sentence warning the good not to be uncharitable, the wicked not to despair, then, methinks, I should die well—better perhaps than if I died repeating prayers like a parrot in St. Paul’s church.

“My first topic will be, I think,

“THE DARK PLACES OF THE LAND.

“ (‘ *The dark places of the land are full of cruelty.*’

Ps. lxxiv. 20.)

“And if that does not sicken,

“THE WISDOM AND FOLLY OF NATIONS.”

Of these essays the former appears in ‘*Readiana*’; the latter we append, inasmuch as it amplifies the author’s project as formulated in brief above.

“THE WISDOM AND FOLLY OF NATIONS.

“Men overrate themselves and everything connected with them. For centuries human astronomers overrated the globe. They knew it for a second-rate planet, and a puny orb compared with the sun; yet they assumed it to be the centre of our planetary system: why?—because they were born on it. That form of egotism is cured, but not the disease itself. Men still overrate one part of this over-rated planet; they think one small section of the earth excels all others in wisdom and virtue. The proof? I, the great I, was born upon it. This is sham patriotism, real egotism, and injurious folly, for it closes the greatest gate of mundane improvement, and makes frontiers a limit to the mind. Whoever travels much, reads much, and loves truth more than

vanity, shall find that every nation is wise and foolish, has much to teach, and much to learn. Probably these letters will evoke a thousand examples of this wholesome truth. Meantime accept a poor specimen by way of mere preliminary. China teaches Europe to economize labour in one way: she constructs high water-wheels with concave steps. These let down into a running stream, raise the water, and discharge it from the highest steps down an incline, and so irrigate the meadow. Macartney made this known in Europe. France uses it. This same China has the wit to see that the respectable trader who sells bad meat is a felon. But this same China puts written prayers into a wheel and turns them for the good of the soul, and proclaims in shop windows 'Gods made, and mended.'

"The French have always, in my day, been socially wise, but politically unwise. They extract much innocent pleasure from everyday life; but they are too prone to hope, from experiments in government, that amelioration of man's lot, which can only come from the popular exercise of private industry, self-denial, and other virtues.

'How small of all the ills that men endure
The part that kings or laws can make or cure.'

This people invented pisciculture, which was wise; and has massacred the small birds, and that is foolish.

"The Prussians were the first to protect children against selfish parents, by compulsory education, and to disregard all the outcry against it: this same wise people goes on, century after century, printing with obscure letters which the superior wisdom of Venice swept away soon after the invention of printing; and all unprejudiced nations have followed Venetian wisdom.

"The Turks have long seen that a man who sells unwholesome food is a felon, and not a civil offender, as we in our folly imagine. But these sensible Turks practise polygamy, which is unwise.

"In England we try questions of law most admirably. The Judges in Banco deliver each his own opinion, with a noble independence; whereas Continental Judges, like the doctors at Trent, agree to agree. Our Criminal Tribunals are without appeal, which is foolish, and yet—folly upon folly—cling to a method,

which is eternally failing to discover the truth, often condemns the innocent, and very often acquits the guilty. We try issues of fact in civil cases very honestly by strict rules of evidence, that exclude some truth but more falsehood; but we are behind our age and our neighbours in the machinery of justice. Although the nation is dotted with cities larger and more enlightened than London was when the very youngest of our great Courts was established, we refuse to all those cities competent jurisdiction and judges worthy of the name. Instead of dividing the country into legal dioceses, which is the Continental and rational system, we cling to superannuated metropolization and strolling justices. Mark the consequences:—whilst the London judges are trapesing about the country, trying hurriedly, and sometimes not trying at all, provincial cases that ought to be all carefully and patiently tried in Bristol, Birmingham, Manchester, Oxford, Nottingham, and York (for trial by jury becomes a national lure if only London judges are allowed to sum up the evidence), our vast metropolis is handed over to the dominion of injustice for three

mortal months. Only conceive!—Justice cut off at the fountain-head for one-fourth of the whole year—justice, which is the breath of every nation's nostrils, and every city's. The Lord's day, Christmas day, and Good Friday, are the only days on which justice ought to intermit. The nation is unwise to allow any other cessation of justice, and unwise to allow it to be called vacation; for that term sets the convenience of a small clique above the vital interests of a great nation, and egotistical phrases, once accepted by a country, perpetuate unjust acts.

“The year 1851 was an epoch in the history of mankind. Several countries compared the products of their skill, which is a kind of wisdom, and even that narrow comparison opened the eyes of national egotism; we all got a glimpse of the salutary truth that every nation has much to learn and much to teach. Successive exhibitions confirmed this truth, and the world is profiting.

“Now if the laws, and customs, and habits of various nations could be brought into one building and submitted to our senses and our judgment, that exhibition of things mental

would teach a nobler and a wider wisdom. The comparison of material objects teaches manufacturers; but this would create lawgivers, and guide philanthropists.

“But no Crystal Palace can do the world so great a service. Can it be done at all?”

“I once thought of a book as the vehicle of comparison; and made copious notes accordingly. But now I am humbler, and therefore most likely wiser. A book written by one man, and containing the fruits of his own travels, researches, and inquiries, is too small a vehicle for so great and dignified a theme.

“The Crystal Palaces point to the only way. There must be many contributors from every nation, and there must be a grand receptacle. I think the columns of a great journal might be the Crystal Palace to receive sifted contributions, and leave the world wiser than they found it.”

CHAPTER XII.

FRIENDS, FAUTORS, AND FAVOURITES.

BEFORE we approach the last success of the author, who considered himself to be before all else a dramatist, a success, the sweetness whereof was doomed to turn to bitter ere it was so much as sipped, it may be well to notice in brief his social life, and also some among the many friends of his literary career.

The twelve years of Albert Gate were perhaps the happiest, as they were certainly the most prosperous, of his entire span. His residence may not inaptly be termed a bijou. It was cosy without being cramped, enriched with works of art throughout; at the back a complete *rus in urbe*, shaded by the trees of the park, on the reverse facing the confluence of three fashionable thoroughfares. In spite of chronic theatrical losses, which absorbed

considerably more—according to his own reiterated asseveration—than half his receipts from literature, he enjoyed an almost unlimited command of ready money, nor was he ever a student of petty economy. The somewhat commanding manner he had inherited from his splendid sire was redeemed by sweetness and affability; and although his bent was never that of a gregarious animal, his society was sought eagerly—chiefly of course by people possessed of some brain power. At thirty-five he had been, so to speak, played out—his Fellowship virtually pawned, his patrimony spent. At fifty-five he could boast himself a gentleman of some fortune; his Fellowship was alike unembarrassed and doubled in value, and his books and plays yielded him a fluctuating revenue.

But, above all, the business partnership with Mrs. Seymour had developed into so tender a friendship as is seldom found to gild the relations of people united only by the tie of mutual esteem. Dean Mansel, in his inimitable satire *Phrontisterion*, sings, “To the bosom of his College fondly turned the childless man.” In Charles Reade’s case the

bosom of his College was about the very hardest pillow his mind could conceive; the most unsympathetic, the most inappreciative. Mrs. Seymour was not a wife, but she proved herself a faithful housekeeper to the College Fellow, the compulsory celibate. Perhaps, without disrespect to her memory, we may say, that her kindly sympathy caused him to forget his loneliness. *Certes*, it became part and parcel of his existence, and when it ceased, his life was wrecked—he died by inches.

There occurred one episode in his tenure of the pretty Dutch-like residence at Albert Gate, which might have terminated disastrously, but for the ten minutes' extra tenacity of a man always eager to fight for his own hand.

Lord Beaumont—in the interest of Belgravia let it be freely admitted—promoted a private bill to form a roadway direct from Sloane Street into the park. This bill, had it passed, would have entailed the demolition of Charles Reade's domicile, and his opinion was not asked as to whether he would be prepared to sacrifice the nest he had made for himself, for the good of the common weal. Had he been consulted, a very ferocious negative might

have been the response. As it was, his blood rose. He painted "Naboth's Vineyard" on the door-posts of his gate, and denounced the offending nobleman as the Ahab of the nineteenth century. All the town took up the tale, and Lord Beaumont's scheme could not have been forwarded by the general chorus of laughter which ensued.

"Going to open a new pub over there?" remarked a Putney bus-driver, not very well instructed in his Old Testament. "Rum sign to give it too! Who's Naboth?"

However, Charles Reade did not evaporate in this variety of protest. He went to work in right good earnest to defeat Lord Beaumont's bill. That nobleman had a very excellent case. There can be no doubt that an entrance to the park facing Sloane Street would be alike picturesque and of advantage to equestrians. It became simply a question which of the two was the better man, the peer or the popular author? hence the latter, fighting as he was for hearth and home, put forth all his strength.

In his guard-book are two letters: from Lord Sherbroke, who, as Mr. Robert Lowe,

had been his tutor in the old days at Magdalen ; and from Lord Selborne who, as Mr. Roundell Palmer, was occasionally his *convive* in the common-room. Both respond graciously to his request for an interview ; the latter especially, who says, "I have seen with much interest and pleasure your distinguished career as a man of letters." They bear the following superscription : "Two fellow-collegians of mine, Robert Lowe and Lord Selborne—Roundell Palmer. Threatened with spoliation in the year 1878 by one of those engines of clandestine iniquity, a private bill, I was obliged to seek interviews with these gentlemen, after forty years. They were both very kind, as big men generally are on these occasions."

Next, he enlisted on his side the eloquence and intelligence of a lawyer having the ear of the House of Commons, Sir Henry James. For the end he had in view this was most fortunate, inasmuch as he was quite in the mood to dictate to both Houses of Parliament dogmatically, and any such line of conduct would have damaged fatally his chances. Sir Henry James, like a prudent advocate, began by taking his irrepressible client in hand.

"My dear Reade," he writes, "I am not surprised at your indignation—which is very clearly shown in your petition. But if you wish to succeed in defeating the bill, you must act with moderation, and take some practical steps for that purpose." He then proceeds to formulate a course of action so as to obtain the support of the Commissioners of Works. Not to prolong the tale of litigious acrimony—the bill was eventually withdrawn by its promoters, mainly in consequence of a letter in the 'Daily Telegraph' from Charles Reade. This effusion was by no means what its author intended—he styles it denaturalized, at Sir Henry James's suggestion; the fire and fury, in fact, having been forcibly eliminated. However, when a few days later he received this missive, "Dear Reade, Take down the 'Naboth's Vineyard.' Bill is withdrawn"—he recognized the wisdom of his counsel's advice, and his comment on Sir Henry James is, "He saved me my property from oligarchical spoliation. Long life to him!"

He has more to say on the following page. Sir Henry James probably failed to realize at a glance how completely incapable Charles

Reade was of comprehending *badinage*, chaff, or the sort of play which obtains among juniors, and is really benevolence, not ill-nature. The author was pre-eminently his mother's son. We have already commented on his perversity in regarding 'Chicken Hazard' as truculent, whereas it was nothing worse than rollicking fun. This is what he writes of Sir Henry James: "A very able lawyer. Will be a judge if he lives and *chooses*.* Has judicial temples. Made fun of me at the club, in a way that rightly or wrongly mortified me, from an able man. Was obliged to write a gentle remonstrance. His manner of receiving it does him the greatest credit." Here follows a very graceful note from Sir Henry James, amply justifying this encomium; and then: "This gentleman has since laid me under a deep and lasting obligation. A private bill to despoil Albert Terrace. I appealed to James as a man of principle. He read the facts—coldly at first, but fired up on principle; whereas vulgar minds are only to be fired by their passions. He advised me, encouraged

* This is prophetic. While these lines were in the press Sir Henry James refused a judgeship.

me, fought for me in the Commons, and with the very wind of his good sword laid the oligarchs low."

That Charles Reade was an admirer of lawyers generally is by no means the case; indeed he possessed a happy diagnosis of judicial as well as forensic ability, while blunderheadedness on the bench or at the bar aroused his scorn. For example, in Mrs. Seymour's action against the Curling family, wherein he posed as her champion, he writes: "My successes have been hardly won. In this case I had to dismiss Jessel (afterwards Master of the Rolls) for incapacity (*sic*); Ballantyne for colloquy with defendant's attorney; T—— (his solicitor), because of his chief clerk's incapacity, and R——s' managing clerk!" After this candid avowal, praise from him becomes doubled in value—the more so because he was sparing of it where lawyers were concerned. We can only discover, among his remains, four members of his profession for whom he expressed decided reverence; these were Mr. Justice Lush, Lord Selborne, Sir Henry James, and Mr. Henry Matthews, the present Home Secretary. The

last-named gentleman, styled "an able junior," won for him the Curling case, *vice* Jessel and Ballantyne—as he puts it, *dismissed*; and he sums up with the reflection, that he never would have obtained this satisfactory result, "but for my eccentricity and resolution in kicking rogues and fools out of the case, one after the other."

When not lashed to fury by a law-suit, or writhing beneath the double-thong of some critical censor, his days passed evenly and pleasantly. His pen, his club, the theatre, an evening at home or with his family, such was the normal round; while Sunday afternoon was devoted to his sister Ellinor so long as her life lasted; and Sunday evening to the reception of friends, for the most part those of Mrs. Seymour. The rule, *nulla dies sine linea*, kept his mind fixed on the work he had on hand, and beyond a doubt the older he grew the more he loved his literary labour. We give a few casual excerpts from his irregular diaries to afford a rough idea of his social life.

"June 8, 1871. My birthday—fifty-seven years old; present from Ellinor, at Brighton, pencil-case. Compton (his brother), staying

with me. This day twelve-month died my good friend and master, Dickens! *Multis ille bonis flebilis*. Dinner—sole, goose, cherry pie, omelet, clotted cream. William came in the evening, brought me some grapes. I say, what a pity a fellow can only be born once a year!

“June 25. Received the visit of Miss —— a Yankee girl, who wants to lecture here—I believe on Dickens. I was weak enough to be decoyed into a promise to hear her lecture privately with a friend or two. Not so weak as to go though. Mean to be more on my guard against the egotism of the people who come to me. In a *personal interview* everybody gets the better of me. This girl tells me Miss —— boasts in America of great intimacy with me, and announces a lecture about my life. I really intended to send her some particulars; but I fear the whole thing will lower me, the lady being a failure. Oh, what caution, what prudence the world requires!

“July 16. Dined Boucicault. Sat next to General Sickles, who murdered Kay, his wife’s corrupter, and after imprisonment fought gallantly in the civil war, and now goes on crutches; one leg I fear. An intelligent man.

Has every hope of the negro: opportunities of studying him. Shook hands with him at parting. Did not feel any repugnance to him. No use saying I did.

"Jan. 1. A large supper-party. Thirty-seven people: Lords Londesborough and Newry, Hon. F. Wingfield, H. Matthews, Q.C., Mr. Lake, Miss Braddon, Henry Neville, Miss Pateman, the rising actress, and several very beautiful actresses.

"By Mrs. Seymour's skill three tables across the room, one taking advantage of entrance. Nobody crushed. Servants—room to wait at all the tables. Two girls did all the waiting without any trouble. No green-grocer in white gloves. No bad music. No dancing. Yet all merry till 4 a.m.

"My nieces, Cecy and Florence, called to wish me good-bye on their way to India. They seem quite *insouciantes*. Florence explained to me why I have no wrinkles—'Because you are not married.'

"Oct. 21. First night of 'The Frozen Deep.' Wigan was good enough to give me an excellent box. Invited Dallas and Mrs. D——. Miss Glyn. Miss Braddon in the

house—chatted with her. Says she got the plot of 'Birds of Prey' at my table. The play poorly acted. It is a pretty play, but wanted a head at rehearsal. Too much narrative; but, after all, original and interesting, and the closing scene great and pathetic. Ah, yes! let us see the goodness and beauty of the human soul on the stage. There is little enough of it to be seen *en ville*!

"Dined with Sir Charles Taylor. Oysters, thin soup, turbot, little mutton pies much peppered, fillet of blackcock (delicious), haunch of red-deer (very fine, and for a wonder tender), ham, jelly, cream, grouse, Italian sardines, little oat-cakes. Six people. No celebrities. Rubber. *Perdidi pecuniam*.

"Breakfast 9.30. Just skimming two newspapers, to be read more carefully after dinner, wasted till 12.30. Thus I never get a day's work and never shall. Pasting in extracts—'Percy about animals,' till nearly three. Tedious work. It being almost impossible to classify them properly at once, I paste them first into a book as classificanda. Then by degrees I may cut them out, and put them in a guard-book in some order. But it is not

easy to me. I have the desire for method, but not the gift.

"Jan. 21. Letters and journals read, and breakfast over by 10.15 a.m.

"2 p.m. Pasted in a few extracts—'Percy.'

"3 p.m. Wrote my first story for publication, title, 'A Special Constable.' The 'Special Constable' is a dog. In its original form it is a mere newspaper anecdote, striking to a man of imagination, but not to the public—thirty-five lines of print. I have made it from an anecdote into a story.

"4 p.m. Story completed—a good day's work."

This story was the first of the series he terms *Bon. Fab.*, published in 'Belgravia' as 'Good Stories of Men and Animals.'

"Dined with Boucicault to warm his new dining-room. *Convives*—Yates, Sir H. Thompson, Webster, a foreigner, a gentleman whose mouth was entirely concealed with hair that looked like a mat, O'Dowd, Boucicault, Reade. No ladies. Clear turtle, thick whiting pudding, lobster-cutlets, salmon suchet, an *entrée*, and a turkey-poult larded. Peas, potatoes, ham. A pleasant dinner,—as it

always is when there are no ladies to confine the conversation within their own narrow bounds,—but not so brilliant as sometimes. Yates good company. Billy Russell was threatened, but did not come unfortunately.”

[N.B. Mr. Edmund Yates was throughout a prime favourite with our author, so much so that he could not bring himself to accept the more than handsome overtures of ‘The Whitehall Review’ lest he should appear in opposition to his friend.]

“Poor old Billy (his brother William) has taken *four stalls* for boxing night, *i.e.* for ‘It is Never too Late to Mend.’ I told my leading lady. Of course, I added, he had *forestalled* the public. She said that was clever. So be it.

“Whist. Lost £3 10s. to Sergeant Ballantyne, of whom I generally win. Ballantyne bets me £1 on the rubber and the usual odds, five to two on the first game.

“*Perdidi diem.* A thoroughly blank day. Not a stroke of work, though I have a great subject on hand. Morning, a few letters. Then two hours’ company. Then four hours’ whist—*proh pudor!* Dinner, and a French

novel. At my age such a day is monstrous, and ought to fill me with shame.

"Letters. Extracting dialect from the drama 'Joan.' Whist—won 23s. Dinner at 6.50, instead of 6.30. Home in good time too. Pheasant, beefsteak pudding, pint of sparkling moselle.

"Dies præ omnibus infelix. Perdidi super whistam sedecim libras. O dies nefastus!"

The above extracts, selected almost at random, give a fair picture of the author's manner of life. He was at that period an honest and laborious toiler, yet a firm believer in the virtue of an amusement which now usurped the hours dedicated in his youth to field-sports, cricket, skittles, bowls, and, be it added, battle-dore and shuttlecock, a very favourite game of his. He seemed to reproach himself for sitting so long over the card-table. Mrs. Seymour, on the other hand, favoured his whist. "It distracts his mind from his work," she said, "and cheers him." Doubtless this may have been the case as a rule; yet evidently when his day's losses reached £16, he was inclined to fret, and on such occasions this particular feature in his daily routine

seemed to prick his conscience. As the years, moreover, rolled on, and his reputation was not enhanced, a feeling of dissatisfaction stole upon him, and at last he thought seriously of standing for some constituency as an independent candidate. Here, however, he encountered the strenuous opposition of Mrs. Seymour.

"Whatever you do," she cried to the writer of these lines, "don't on any account urge your uncle to embark on a career for which his irritability unfits him."

Mrs. Seymour may have judged rightly, and certainly Charles Reade's age seemed almost to offer a bar to a political experiment. Anyhow the notion never got beyond mere discussion; the course of events took another, and a sadder turn.

In connection with the ordinary social life of our author we believe it will be of interest both to mention in brief his chief literary friends, and also, where feasible, to append his verdict on them, and theirs on him.

Next to Lord Lytton, the novelist, whose letters he religiously preserved, Charles Dickens occupied the highest place in his esteem. He styles him, as we have already

seen, his "master," and held his genius in love and reverence. On one occasion he had the alternative of meeting at dinner a member of the aristocracy, whom he had every reason to cultivate, or Charles Dickens. His reply was caustic. "If I am asked to meet a celebrity or an obscurity," he wrote, "I prefer the celebrity."

Among many letters—the longer of them referring to the unalluring topic of international copyright—addressed by Charles Dickens to Charles Reade, it is hardly possible to make a satisfactory selection. Here is a kindly fragment: "I *must* write you a line to say how interested I am in your story, and to congratulate you upon its admirable art, and its surprising force and vigour."

Again:—this from Gadshill—"My dear Reade, you once gave me hope of your coming down to see me here; could you join our family party on the last day of the old year? If so, I should be delighted to see you, and to show you an old castle, and an old county in a new year's day ramble.

"Faithfully yours always,
"CHARLES DICKENS."

Under this honoured name Charles Reade wrote in his guard-book but one word, "Eheu!", a fitting tribute. He held Charles Dickens to be the greatest Englishman of the century, and never hesitated to express his indignation at a system which has choked the peerage with third-rate lawyers, and tenth-rate politicians, while it has almost without exception excluded genius. His own labours on behalf of the oppressed, his self-sacrificing philanthropy, not to mention his art, never received the smallest recognition; and on the one occasion, when he headed a deputation on the subject of international copyright to interview Lord Beaconsfield, that eminent personage exhibited the quality of his breeding by yawning in his face. He had not to yawn twice. Charles Reade came to an abrupt pause in the very core of his subject, bowed, and retired.

Among his epistolary treasures a letter of Miss Hogarth was especially cherished. It is addressed from Gadshill on the eve of departure from that home which the supreme novelist had created and adorned. "My dear Mr. Reade," this lady writes, "my dearest

brother-in-law left me a legacy of all the little familiar objects in his room and on his writing-table. And I understood him to mean, that I should distribute them amongst the many friends who loved him. My task has been a very difficult one—as you may suppose—the ‘objects’ being so very few in proportion. So I am obliged to give the merest trifle to each. But I am quite sure that you—who loved and revered him as he deserved—will be glad to have something that belonged to him familiarly, even though the thing is of no value in itself. Therefore I venture to send you this little pen-tray as a relic. It belonged to our little sitting-room at the office,—a place that he was very fond of,—and used very much, so that this little article was constantly under his eye, and associated with his familiar everyday life. Will you accept it from me with my love and regard? You don’t need to be told by me—still I think it will be pleasant to you—now—to have a fresh assurance of the affection and esteem in which he held you. You did not meet very often; but I never heard him speak of you except with the heartiest and most cordial

expressions of admiration, respect, and personal affection.

"We leave this dear place for ever next Monday. It will be a good thing for us all now when that wrench is over; but it is a terrible hour to look forward to.

"Believe me, my dear Mr. Reade,

"Affectionately yours,

"GEORGINA HOGARTH."

The above is inscribed by Charles Reade, "a valued letter from Miss Hogarth, giving me Dickens' pen-tray, and assuring me of his kindly feelings towards me, which indeed *he* never left me in doubt of."

His idolatry of Charles Dickens caused our author perhaps to under-estimate not only George Eliot, but Thackeray also, and Trollope. The last-named novelist, if quick to resent what he deemed a liberty, was filled with kindly sentiments for his brother in art, and spoke of him with warmth. Charles Reade was more appreciative of a writer of the same school—Mrs. Oliphant—possibly because of her sex, for he was indisposed towards severity where lady-authors were con-

cerned, provided that they were not unduly belauded, and avoided the philosophical error of dulness. He has preserved some of this lady's letters, but without comment. Next to Dickens, however, he ranked, *qualis inter viburna cupressus*, his very dear friend, Mr. Wilkie Collins—"An artist of the pen. There are terribly few among writers," was his terse eulogium, the plain fact being that this past-master in the art of dramatic construction excels all competitors just where most English authors fail. His plots resemble nothing so much as the intricate arabesques of an oriental designer. Their complexity dazzles, yet they are always simple, never obscure. Moreover—and here they commanded Charles Reade's most earnest enthusiasm—they, or rather some of them, lend themselves intuitively to the stage. They dramatize easily and naturally; indeed 'The New Magdalen' may be fairly termed one of the most effective of modern dramas. Mr. Wilkie Collins, therefore, if we may put it so, hit Charles Reade's ideal, and secured, in consequence, that sort of genuine admiration which an author offers his brother in art when he esteems him greater than

himself. It would be an impertinence to institute a comparison between writers in every detail dissimilar. Enough that Charles Reade rendered due homage to his friend, and towards him was as appreciative as affectionate. He preserved his letters as heir-looms for his family—in a word, he believed in him both as a man, and as an author whose future is assured.

In no less esteem did he hold another of the great novelists of the Victorian era. Mrs. John Maxwell (M. E. Braddon) possesses that special quality which Charles Reade cultivated as a prime essential of dramatic narration—*v. z.* the faculty of enchaining a reader without a halt or break. It was this idea which caused our author, *malgrè* the example of Dickens, to describe a story within a story as “a flaw in art”—*i. e.* it destroys the main interest. No sooner had this most charming writer gained a reputation, as it were by a stroke of the pen, than Charles Reade hastened to court her acquaintance, and this soon ripened into friendship. He was ever grateful for the generous hospitality of Lichfield House, but most especially so when he could monopolize

the attention of its mistress. He avowed himself, in fact, thoroughly happy in the company of Mrs. Maxwell, delighted with her conversation, interested in herself, her books, and all that concerned her. We are fortunately able to append this lady's own brief reminiscences of a friend, and a very sincere one also. Would that in return we could reproduce the hundred and one kind words he had always on the tip of his tongue for her!

"One of the brightest memories of my literary life," she writes, "is my memory of Mr. Charles Reade. He sought me out at the outset of my career, and extended the hand of friendship to a beginner in literature with a generous kindness which never failed me in after years. He had a chivalrous and protecting spirit in all his dealings with women, or with the weak: the same spirit which so often urged him to fight on the losing side, and to bring to bear all the power of his fiery pen in the cause of the fallen or the oppressed. He, who in public life was the fiercest of foes and partisans, where wrong or injustice had to be encountered, was in domestic life the

gentlest, meekest, loveliest spirit: the ideal gentleman and Christian, full to overflowing of that charity which suffereth long and is kind.

“How many traits of gentleness I could recall, did I not fear to lapse into triviality. One little incident struck me as characteristic of his benevolence and thoughtfulness for others. He was in the habit of having his manuscript copied in a large bold hand on foolscap paper, leaving about half of each sheet as margin for corrections and interpolations.

“‘My copyist calls every day for more work,’ he said, ‘and I don’t like to disappoint him, poor fellow, so he keeps me up to the mark, when I am inclined to be idle.’

“His house was a refuge for the destitute and the unhappy. To be in trouble was a passport to Charles Reade’s hospitality; and that faithful friend of long years who brightened his home by her genial presence was of the same temper. To nurse the sick, to comfort the mourner, to create an atmosphere of friendliness and easy gracious hospitality, was as natural to Laura Seymour as to Charles Reade.

“To children his manner was delightful; and he never seemed bored by their presence. In many of his tastes, notably his gastronomical tastes, he was still a child: liked jams, and tarts, and puddings, and had a childish leaning to the unwholesome, rather than the wholesome in diet. His love of pets, and strange ones, was in some wise childlike. Well do I remember his effort to acclimatize a small antelope in his back garden, and his pride in the melancholy-looking beast which stared in at us through the plate-glass doors of his study. He tried hard to tame a hare, to be to him what Puss was to Cowper; but the animal was too stupid to appreciate or understand the honour conferred upon him. Only man's true and loyal friend, the horse or the dog, was worthy of Charles Reade's love. His note-books were a hobby and a pride; but as these are known to the public, I will not dwell upon them. Once I ventured to ask if these huge store-houses of miscellaneous information really repaid him for the trouble of collecting them. He was not angry, but answered meekly, ‘Well, perhaps they do not. I sometimes doubt if they are not too voluminous to be useful;’ yet

with a glance of pride at the elephantine red-backed folios ranged at the base of his cyclopean writing-table.

“To have him all to oneself, as it were, in a long evening of discursive talk, drifting from one subject to another, was unalloyed delight. Would that there had been a Boswell to remember and preserve all such conversations! Deepest thought and strong originality marked all his ideas and opinions upon men and books; and no man I ever met had a more generous appreciation of the merits of his contemporaries, or a greater reverence for the mighty dead. I remember once when looking through his books with him, he laid his hand upon Campbell’s ‘Life of Lord Mansfield,’ and said, ‘What a man that was. Some of his judgments exhibit a sense of justice that was almost divine?’ And there was a touch of pathos in the earnestness of his tone.

“He had a profound contempt for the theorists who argue that Shakespeare was an incapable and an impostor, a mere stalking-horse for Lord Bacon. It was a sign of incipient madness, he declared, to have any doubt as to the identity of him who wrote ‘Macbeth’

and 'Othello.' 'It was no more in Bacon's power to have written those plays than it was in Locke's or Dugald Stewart's. The whole bent and character of the man's mind was different.'

"Poet, dreamer, and thinker as he was in hours of relaxation, in all the business of life he was severely practical. Never was a man more 'in the movement' of his time. I told him once that I rarely read the newspapers, as I had only too little time for reading books. 'You should read the papers,' he said, 'and leave books alone.'

"Late in the evening he would seat himself at the piano, and after playing a few chords, would sing some old-world ballad, in a low voice which was full of tenderness. Those simple pathetic songs seemed a fitting close to the long evening of talk. Never can I forget those evenings in our house or in his, nor his genial welcome at all times, pleased to be taken by surprise in his picturesque working-room, half library, half picture-gallery, always greeting his friends with the same gentle cordiality.

"Difficult to believe that this most gracious

and exceptionally courteous English gentleman was the bellicose Charles Reade, whose spirited advocacy of his own cause, when smarting under piracy, or malevolent libel, had all the force and vigour of Cicero, or Edward Clarke."

Charles Reade was, perhaps—as regards the male sex at all events—a man of no intimates, yet of many acquaintances, and oftentimes rated an author as his friend, as it were for the sake of sympathy, and because he respected his brain-power. Thus, for example, he styled Mr. James Rice, "one of my few friends on the press, as it is called—a Cambridge man;" adding, as a foot-note, and has since written, "Ready-money Mortiboy." Elsewhere he has more to say in favour of that excellent book, nor does he omit in his eulogium the senior partner in its production, Mr. Walter Besant. Strange to relate, he failed to perceive merit in 'Ouida' till the writer of these lines placed in his hand that tragic idyll, 'Two little Wooden Shoes,' when at once he burst forth into rhapsody. Miss Broughton was summed up briefly as "a spirited girl." To the sterner sex he is not always quite so civil, *e.g.* he thus

describes Mr. Mark Twain:—"An American humourist, and really has much humour. But oh! his speech! Knock a macaw's head on an iron rail!" Mark Lemon he dismisses as a genial companion and a writer of smart farces, adding sorrowfully the valedictory "Gone!"—his tribute to those among his circle who had left it. For Shirley Brooks he has no more to say than that he was his good friend.

It would be unhandsome on our part if we failed to enumerate among Charles Reade's brothers in the Republic of Literati his earliest friend and collaborator, Mr. Tom Taylor, or his literary partner of later days, Mr. Dion Boucicault. Mr. Tom Taylor, in a certain sense, may be deemed the medium whereby he first appeared before the public. He was that estimable gentleman's frequent guest. Mr. Arnold Taylor describes their collaboration in 'Masks and Faces,' as thus: "one was the cutter-out; the other the cuttee." Whether that be a correct representation of the creative process which resulted in so grand a success, or only partly accurate, certain it is that at that time Charles Reade leaned on Tom Taylor for advice, and received from him a

boon he sorely stood in need of, *viz.* encouragement. Many years later, when Tom Taylor's race was run, and the gifted musician who had been his life's partner was a widow, Charles Reade evinced his appreciation of Tom Taylor's aid, in a manner alike characteristic and delicate. He knew how deeply he was indebted to the strong man who placed his foot for him on the first rung of the ladder of fame.

We have already noticed Mr. Dion Boucicault's share in 'Foul Play.' This collaboration gratified Charles Reade more thoroughly than any during his life-time; and although he could chaff Mr. Boucicault as "a sly fox," esteemed both his society and friendship very highly. On one occasion, when a remark was hazarded in disparagement of a drama by this gentleman, he returned contemptuously on the speaker with the query, "Will you find me another man in England who could write such a comedy?" Nor was his belief in Mr. Boucicault ever shaken—indeed he envied his capacity for commanding both the tears and laughter, the astonishment and delight, of the Gallery.

Our author's acquaintance with journalists was not quite as extensive as might have been presupposed. Mr. Yates he thoroughly liked, but chiefly as a novelist who possesses a strong grasp of plot and situation. Mr. Edwin Arnold he corresponded with for many years, and on a great variety of subjects. His appreciation of the poet and essayist, the scholar and the orientalist, may be inferred from the simple fact that he cherished all letters from this gentleman having reference to his books. He has headed his name in his guard-book with the Horatian compliment, *Integer vitæ scelerisque purus*; and in mentioning the fact of Mr. Arnold having sent him a copy of 'Hero and Leander,'—*merum sal* he defines it,—says, "I never meet this excellent person, but our mutual respect remains unchanged; and I often see in 'The Telegraph' allusions and passing illustrations that show me how well he has read, and understood, my works."

Mr. Greenwood, erst of the 'Pall Mall Gazette,' gave him a place in his columns on more than one occasion, and their intercourse was agreeable and cordial. He dubbed him "a most intelligent and business gentleman."

George Lewes on one occasion wrote, "an article by you that wouldn't be worth printing would be a curiosity in its way—it must be so infernally wrong." Mr. John Oxenford he describes "as a very genial companion;" and he displayed his esteem for John Forster by preserving his autograph, as also that of Mr. Sutherland Edwards. Nevertheless, although he elected to inscribe along with the more exact designations, dramatist and novelist, that also of journalist on his tombstone, he never fraternized largely with the press-gang. Politics, and indeed political men, failed to interest him. His was not the type of mind to stomach compromises or to tolerate party manœuvres; hence his impatience of home politics—indeed he was far more affected by those of the United States; and it is quite the case that none were more welcome at Albert Gate than Americans. He defined Reverdy Johnson as "a just man," wrote warmly of Dr. Russell Lowell, and was ever charmed by the society of his distant cousin, General Meredith Read, of the U.S. Legation at Athens.

The force of circumstances, no less than

inclination, brought him into close connection with the dramatic profession. Mrs. Seymour's personal friends were all, of either sex, wearers of the sock and buskin. They thronged her portion of the Albert Gate home; and generally, though not invariably, were acceptable to its master. Devoted to the drama, he could but assimilate up to a certain point with its exponents. Yet, to be strictly truthful, even these very charming people could bore him. "It's all very well," he said, *apropos* of his histrionic friends, "if you will be content to sit by the hour and listen to the record of their triumphs—then they are delighted with you." In extenuation of this speech we may add that he was too easily bored, and not seldom went off into a brown study, leaving the individual addressing him to run on, and run down, *à discretion*. The habit of total self-abstraction had become rooted; and often when an auditor condemned his inattention as rude, he could not help himself. It required a woman, and one with a well-stored mind, a versatile tongue, and quick sympathy, such as Miss Braddon (Mrs. John Maxwell), to hold his attention for any length of time; and there were a few—a

very few members of the theatrical profession thus endowed, whose company was to him supremely grateful.

Among them we may mention first, and most particularly, the two gifted sisters, Kate and Ellen Terry. The latter he regarded almost in the light of a daughter; on the former he lavished praise, such as in his younger days he would have reserved solely for Mrs. Stirling. This is his deliverance on the elder sister :

“The sweetest, tenderest, and most intelligent actress of the day. Young in years, but old in experience, and fuller of talent than ever an egg was of meat. She shone most, to my mind, in modern characters, and her *forte* lay in the pathetic. She represented with great truth all feminine sorrows. I have seen actresses with more fire, but none to equal her in sweet and gentle pathos. The moment she stepped on the stage the manly breast took a keen interest in her. I had only twice the good fortune to do business with her. Aged thirteen she played Joliquet in ‘The Courier of Lyons,’ and Dora in my poetical drama was her last creation. She played the two

parts to absolute perfection. In 'Dora' she sang 'The Brook' to her dying lover; broke down in the middle of the words, 'For men may come and men may go'; shed real tears, and then by an effort finished the song. This was *genius*. She had little voice, but by dint of brains far outsang the operatic singers. Her face not remarkably pretty in absolute repose, but beautiful under the illumination of expression. Dora, terrified by her uncle's violence, swoons away at last. Miss Terry did this with such absolute truth in all the details, that I went behind the scene one night to watch her more closely. But, if I had gone with a microscope, this honest and careful artist would have borne the test—it was quite indistinguishable from a real faint; and the little hysterical sobs with which she came to, and then the gentle weeping, and the dovelike way she said, 'his hard words frightened me so,' was infinitely feminine and lovable. At twenty-six years of age she married Mr. Arthur Lewis, and left the stage for ever.

"We had her on the boards, though, in 1870. I produced the '*Malade Imaginaire*.' We got Kate to rehearsal, and after rehearsal

she gave me her ideas in private; and in her excitement pulled me all down the room, with amazing vigour, I remember. This young lady attends the theatre constantly on first nights, and the sight of her face always gives me a thrill of pleasure. Such is the power of association, set agoing by memory of her rare talent and intelligence. She was an actress who never whined. Now, the women all whine upon the stage."

Miss Ellen Terry has assumed all the laurels her clever sister gathered, and added withal to them more than one crown of her own. She has played in two hemispheres as the representative actress of England, her genius having commanded the generous, if not always ungrudging, plaudits of our intelligent and hypercritical American cousins. The following paragraph of Charles Reade's *catalogue raisonnée* was penned before this great artist had attained her zenith, at a time when she was overshadowed by her elder sister. Its strain is that which might be applied to a clever *débutante* of tender years, who regarded the white-haired dramatist as her quasi-father, and indeed addressed him playfully as such.

"Yes, dear papa," she wrote, "I hope to be with you to-morrow at dinner. Thank you for saying I may come. Most affectionately your Ellen Terry.

Love to Mrs. Seymour."

Whereupon Charles Reade, in giving this pretty billet a niche in his guard-book, appends this comment:

"ELLEN TERRY. A young lady highly gifted with what Voltaire justly calls *le grand art de plaire*. She was a very promising actress—married young to Mr. Watts the painter. Unfortunate differences ended in a separation, and instead of returning to the stage she wasted some years in the country.¹ In 1873 I coaxed her back to play Philippa at The Queen's Theatre, and she was afterwards my leading actress in a provincial tour. She played Helen Rolleston very finely (Foul Play). In 1875 engaged to play Portia at The Prince of Wales' Theatre; and her performance is the principal histrionic attraction, the Shylock of Mr. Coghlan being considered somewhat slow and monotonous.

"Ellen Terry is an enigma. Her eyes are pale, her nose rather long, her mouth nothing

particular. Complexion a delicate brick-dust, her hair rather like tow. Yet somehow she is *beautiful*. Her expression *kills* any pretty face you see beside her. Her figure is lean and bony, her hand masculine in size and form. Yet she is a pattern of fawn-like grace. Whether in movement or repose, grace pervades the lussy. In character impulsive, intelligent, weak, hysterical—in short all that is abominable and charming in woman.

DIALOGUE.

ELLEN TERRY. And who is your leading lady now—that I may hate her?

CHARLES READE. Miss ———.

ELLEN TERRY (rubbing her hands). Oh, I'm so pleased. *She* can give you a good hiding. *She will* too!

Again:

"Ellen Terry is a very charming actress. I see through and through her. Yet she pleases me all the same. Little duck!"

It was a decided misfortune for the success of Charles Reade's later dramas, more particularly 'Drink,' whereof more anon—that he was unable to secure the services of this lady,

whose devotion to him was indeed filial, whose capacity for the creation of character is unrivalled. That was not to be. She had already assumed the foremost position on the stage, and had higher aims to fulfil. But that she never faltered in her regard for her "Papa-in-art," must ever be a subject of gratulation to those who, like ourselves, reverence his memory; the more so, because he must often have tried her temper when she was his leading lady, for in matters of stage management he was a tyrannical disciplinarian. For all that, the man and the woman of genius learnt to esteem each other; and he watched her upward career, not merely with pleasure, but with a sort of paternal pride.

It will go without the saying that the creator of that superb part, 'Peg Woffington,' felt no small indebtedness to the lady, who, *malgrè* an inevitable facial dissimilarity to the Irish actress of history, enacted the character sympathetically, and with rare fascination. Below a very natural and sweet letter of hers, ending with a cordial "God bless you!", Charles Reade has inscribed these words, "Mrs. Bancroft (Marie Wilton), a gifted and amiable

artist, who in this letter makes too much of my friendliness, which both she and her husband had so richly earned by their kindness and courtesy to me." On another page in the same volume is a cordial note from Mr. Bancroft, which the recipient retained for the writer's sake.

A prime favourite with Charles Reade was that most vivacious and sparkling of comedians, Mrs. John Wood. He has a strong word of commendation for this lady, whose natural vein of fun oozes out at all times and in all seasons; *e.g.* on board the good ship *Calabria*, off Queenstown, she wrote, "tell Mrs. Seymour I shall never forget her, for I owe her two-and-sixpence;" and, a few lines further on, "I have been a little sick, and hope to be more so." This is his definition: "MRS. JOHN WOOD, an actress with real humour, almost the only one left us by burlesque. Since writing this and other letters to me, she has become a manager and has played, *inter alia*, Phœbe in 'Paul Pry' with an effect never attained before. Charming droll, on the stage and off it. While I write this, has astonished the public by her performance of *Philippa*, in my drama, 'The Wandering Heir.'"

Another lady of sterling merit who obtained our author's approbation as an artist, and his esteem on account of her womanly qualities, was Mrs. Bella Pateman. Elsewhere he expressed his conviction that she was destined to advance to the front rank of her profession when as yet she was only a *débutante*. In his guard-book he writes of her in terms expressive of sincere admiration—indeed the concluding words have themselves the significance of volumes.

This is what he has to say : "MRS. PATEMAN. A respectable actress. The tender and true affection between her and her worthy husband are beautiful to see in a theatre—*that den of lubricity*."

Last, but not least, among Charles Reade's theatrical friends of the fair sex must be mentioned the brightest ornament of the profession, one whose genius and whose virtues alike illumine and exalt the stage, Mrs. Kendall. Always gentle and playful with children, he visited this lady's nursery at the time when his mind was absorbed with ambidexterity, and essayed to teach the little ones how to use either hand and arm

indifferently. The experiment of course was futile, but the remembrance of that professorial lecture has lasted in Harley Street to this very hour. Is it not true that what good men do—even if it be of dubious utility—is destined to live after them?

Among Charles Reade's theatrical friends of the sterner sex, the name of Henry Irving stands prominent. He asseverated that—in the wilds of Manchester—he was the original discoverer of this rare nugget. Mr. Irving denies the soft impeachment. Nevertheless, though erroneous, it was as firm an article of Charles Reade's belief as was George the Fourth's in his presence at Waterloo. Be that as it may, no critic ever described the great actor more analytically than Charles Reade. In speaking of his series of triumphs at the Lyceum, he seems to us to have hit the very centre of the gold when he affirmed, that all must be attributed to Mr. Irving's *presence*, his magnetic power over an audience. This potentiality exists alike in actors and orators of the highest calibre. It is quite apart from speech, for the spell is cast before a word is uttered. It was noteworthy

especially in Samuel Wilberforce; and is possessed in a high degree by Dr. Parker. The late Rev. Robert Aitken was endowed with this gift in so great a degree that before he had spoken a dozen words his suppressed emotion seemed contagious, and the church resounded with sobs. It was this sublime quality which Charles Reade, the most acute of all observers, and not the least susceptible of emotion, perceived in Mr. Irving, *before that great artist was a known man*; and it was his boast, that whereas Tom Taylor failed to recognize it, it came to him as a revelation. Needless to add that, like all lovers of the drama, he rejoiced that this country and this age should possess so splendid an exponent of the form of art he loved so well. Mr. Irving's letters to him were preserved religiously, as precious treasures.

We have already adverted to his friendly respect for Mr. Henry Neville. There was, apart from the stage, much to evoke such a sentiment. Those who have perused these pages must have learnt, if they knew it not before, that Charles Reade was pre-eminently both a *man* and an adorer of art. Mr. Neville

was here his *alter ego*. He is an enthusiastic volunteer, and had he been a soldier would have adorned the profession of arms. He is also a draughtsman of no mean capacity, and thus also was in harmony with one who boasted himself a connoisseur of pictures as well as of violins. It was a singular coincidence that the descendant of the Ipsden smith—and they had a grand forge there in the olden days, when the beechen logs served for fuel and coal was a luxury—should have set manly Henry Neville to forge a blade on the stage, and perhaps himself have instructed him how to go to work. Certainly, not merely ‘Put Yourself in His Place,’ but ‘*Sera Nunquam*’ also, owed much to this same sterling artist—a debt Charles Reade was ever ready to acknowledge in full.

Mr. Charles Warner and Mr. J. L. Toole were both claimed by our author, if we may put it so, as his selections. The former may be termed fairly one of the biggest trumps a dramatist ever held in his hand. He imparted life, vigour, and romance to the character of Tom Robinson, and as Coupeau was phenomenal; indeed, he not only created the

character, but saved Charles Reade's adaptation of '*L'Assommoir*.' As a small token or reminder of their joint success the author gave the actor a cup bearing the inscription, "*Hoc Carolo Carolus frater in arte dedit.*" They were in truth *fratres fraterrimi*; yet at the outset the author felt a little bit piqued. "Let them praise Charley Warner as much as they will," he pleaded, "but it is not quite fair altogether to ignore Charley Reade."

Whether Mr. Toole was indebted to Charles Reade for sponsorship, is not quite so clear. That gentleman's first London engagement was under Mrs. Seymour at the St. James' Theatre, so that it would seem likely the manageress may have been influenced by the judgment of her partner in theatrical speculation. Mr. Toole made a success in '*Honour before Title*,' one of our author's least known dramas; and played Triplet to Mrs. Seymour's '*Peg Woffington*,' at Edinburgh. He writes, "I knew Mr. Charles Reade very well, and liked him very much, and I think he liked me. He was greatly in earnest in all his works, and once brought an action for libel against the '*Morning Advertiser*,' respecting one of his

plays called 'Shilly-shally.' He was very anxious for me to appear in the witness-box, and *give evidence in the dress of the character I acted, and act the scene before the judge and jury!* Of course I did not do so." The more's the pity, we can but remark. The deadly-dulness of the bar witticisms would have been pleasantly relieved by the apparition of Mr. Toole in panoply.

The circumstances in connection with a letter from Mr. Wilson Barrett preserved by Charles Reade are of so delicate a nature—relating in fact to a money question—that we feel ourselves unable to publish it. Yet we can but regret our inability to do so, for assuredly a more magnanimous and chivalrous communication from manager to author was never penned. This great actor had barely attained his zenith when the terrible blow descended that shattered the artistic life of Charles Reade. It was as a man, and a gentleman therefore, that he knew Mr. Wilson Barrett for the most part—yet he lived to see him play and appreciate his genius.

There remain two histrionic celebrities, each of whom, owing to their Yankee flavour, inter-

ested Charles Reade. Mr. Jefferson he styles "a distinguished American actor, known here by his personation of 'Rip Van Winkle,'—also a very intelligent man off the stage." Of Mr. Sothern, representative of Lord Dundreary, etc., he writes, "This gentleman is a dry humourist. I believe he professes to mesmerize; and, in imitation of Davenport Brothers, he can get his hands out of any knot I can tie. His Dundreary is true comedy, not farce, as fools fancy. He is as grave as a judge over it, and in that excellent quality a successor to Liston. He plays nothing downright ill, except his first act of 'David Garrick.' His immobility of countenance during the scene with the merchant is false and feeble in itself, and singularly out of character—David being historically famous for mobility of countenance and varying expression; whereas this actor plays that scene with the face of a wooden dolt, though the lines give him every opportunity of changing his expression from grave to gay, from lively to severe."

Space forbids our handling in detail every member of that brilliant theatrical circle whereof Charles Reade might have boasted

quorum pars magna fui. He writhed under Mr. Burnand's euphuistic satire, yet preserved a genial epistle of his, commencing with 'No Larks!' as a friendly memory of the buried hatchet. Boddam Donne he defines as a ripe scholar and a good friend; Miss Furtado he praises for her beauty, but blames for an excessive tremolo. Horace Wigan earned the epithet "a dry old chip;" on Benjamin Webster he was even more severe: "an admirable actor," he calls him, "when he happens to have studied the words." To Mr. John Clayton he is more civil—"actor, and a promising one. This young man gets up wonderfully well. As a rule that part of the art is not learnt early in an actor's career. I declare that he must be a painter, he varies his head and face so finely." Miss Ada Cavendish is "an actress of some power, very handsome, a clever woman." Mr. Kendall "a good actor." Mr. R. Buchanan, "a very clever fellow." Of Mr. Hare he always spoke as of the very truest gentleman who ever enacted the *rôle* of *gentleman* on the stage; and, like the rest of the world, he avowed himself an admirer of that brilliant, yet brief, meteor, Miss Ada Isaacs Menken, as thus: "a clever

woman, with beautiful eyes—very dark blue. A bad actress, but made a hit by playing Mazeppa in tights. She played one scene in ‘Black-eyed Susan,’ with true feeling. A trigamist, or quadrigamist, her last husband, I believe, was John Heenan, the prize-fighter. I saw him fight Tom King. Menken talked well and was very intelligent in private. She spoiled her looks off the stage with white lead, or whatever it is these idiots of women wear. She did not rouge, but played some devilry with her glorious eyes, which altogether made her spectral. She wrote poetry. It was as bad as other people’s—would have been worse if it could. Requiescat in pace. Goodish heart. Loose conduct. Gone!”

A lover of pictures, Charles Reade was perhaps too dogmatic in his ideas to assimilate much with painters. He has written of Sir Frederick Leighton that he is “one of the best read men of the age.” He described Sir J. E. Millais as “The English Titian,” and Mr. O’Neill won his favour. In his last years he gave a commission to an Italian lady to paint—on the lines of Gainsborough’s Blue-boy—a portrait of his great-nephew, Master Scott Reade; and

was annoyed that the hanging committee failed to recognize its merit. Frankly, he was by no means easy for a painter to please, while in his musical notions he approximated Philistinism. He cared for none but broad effects, and upheld Handel as the Shakespeare of music. Art, from his point of view, is not for higher natures, but for all; and what transcends the comprehension of the average human being and fails therefore to influence, from his point of view, was valueless. Hence he underrated the value of composers, and had few musical friends.

Victor Hugo appreciated his genius, none the less, perhaps, because he wrote in French as well as in English, so also did Brisebarre, Macquet, and Zola. In his guard-book is a very touching letter from Hugo, ending, "*Je salue votre noble esprit.*" In this volume also he cherished the autographs of "my invaluable friend," Rev. J. Gibson, minister of Kirkhope, of Hain Friswell, with a sketch of Mrs. Seymour, Lords Hartington and Newry, Mr. W. H. Smith, the poet Southey, Lord Townshend,— "a very benevolent gentleman"—Artemus Ward, Mr. Smith, "The Prince of Publishers," Dean Gaisford, Mr. Hollingshead, Archbishop

Sumner, Mr. James Fields of Boston,—“and a very clever writer, let me tell you,”—General Meredith Read, “my American cousin,” James Lambert, “The Hero and the Martyr,” Mr. John Blackwood, Miss Dickens, Mr. Dicey, George Vining, Mrs. Charles Matthews, Buckstone, Bernal Osborne, Webster, Mr. Trübner, “worthy Mr. Plimsoll, who deserves a civic crown,” Baron Grant, Alderman Mechi, Mr. C. Thorne, the American actor, “with an admirable gift of representing suppressed emotion,” Mr. Henry Morford, an American journalist,—“I think he once told me he had had eleven bones broken first and last,”—Baron Tauchnitz, Mr. James Rice, Shirley Brooks,—dating from “Noah’s Ark, second deluge,”—Mrs. Lehmann, a daughter of Robert Chambers,—on the death of Charles Dickens, Dr. Bandinel, the Bodleian Librarian at Oxford, Mr. Henry Matthews, Alfred Wigan, Mr. Forbes Robertson, Reverdy Johnson, Lord Shaftesbury, and last, not least, a letter from his venerable mother in her ninetieth year. The book may fitly be described as a curiosity of epistolary literature.

CHAPTER XIII.

DEAD-SEA FRUIT.

It was on a lovely June afternoon in 1879 that a cab drove up hurriedly to the portal of a house in Claverton Street, and from thence emerged a tall handsome gentleman, white bearded, but erect and picturesque, bearing in his hands several colossal volumes. In another minute he had ascended—rather breathlessly—the staircase, and greeted affectionately his niece, Mrs. Compton Reade.

“You are the musician of the family,” he said—this lady studied under Otto Goldschmidt at the Royal Academy—“and I have come to requisition your services.”

The colossal volumes proved to be *Les Chansons de Noël*, a superb collection of all the Yuletide music of fair France—carols, whose origin is lost in the obscurity of remote

ages, tender, sweet, and romantic, if at times crude as the Gregorian plain-song or the ancient Greek modes.

"We are to have a carol sung in the snow," he said, "with harp accompaniment; and now to select one."

The reference, we need not add, was to his forthcoming drama, entitled 'Drink'—already in rehearsal at The Princess' Theatre.

His niece's fingers and wits were soon at work. To make a selection from some hundreds of pastoral *chansons*, was no easy task. A quick instinct, however, and an eye trained to read music at sight, rapidly winnowed those utterly unsuitable, whether from peculiarity of rhythm or lack of melody. After about three hours' stiff work the choice was reduced to three, and eventually a strain selected, which though simple has all the intense charm of true pathos.

"The very thing," cried Charles Reade ecstatically.

It was a curious coincidence that Gounod's *Messe Solennelle* was at the moment unknown in this country, if written at all. One among the gems—perhaps *the gem par excellence*—of

that sublime composition, is the *Benedictus*; and we need say no more than that the resemblance between that dulcet melody and the *Chanson de Noël*, selected by Mrs. Compton Reade for the snow scene in 'Drink' is, to say the least, remarkable.

Having further begged for a march from her facile pen for the entr'acte music, Charles Reade insisted that his niece should attend the final rehearsal. "They will make a bungle of it if they can," he pleaded. Accordingly we all appeared at The Princess' Theatre on the Saturday afternoon, the piece being set down for Whit-Monday. There was the usual confusion: the property-man invisible; the minor players, apparently, by no means perfect in their parts; positions to be studied; while the lessee wanted a harmonium in lieu of a harp, which would have wrecked the effect of our lovely *Chanson de Noël*. They manage anything vocal, outside the range of noise and clap-trap, infamously on the stage, having no more idea of part-singing than pigs. However, somehow the rehearsal was got through; but Charles Reade, who dined with us, seemed fairly out of spirits.

"Seymour is ill," he moaned, "and for the first time can't be present at my first night. A bad omen!"

We who had witnessed what Mr. Warner could do, and foresaw the surprise in store for the audience, tried to cheer him. In vain.

Monday came. The house was crammed—never fuller, if so full. There had been a little difference in the green-room between the two ladies who, on the lines of the play, were bound to souse each other in the wash-house scene, neither being ardently ambitious of a drenching, yet each feeling morally convinced that the other ought to submit to immersion. If both these admirable people shirked that terrible ordeal, the curtain would fall for the first act on a *coup manqué*. We watched with breathless interest.

Jam satis. One of them escaped the soap-suds, but the other caught her avalanche full. That was enough for the spectators. The figure of one of Her Majesty's servants dripping on the stage with *real* water exhilarated a Whit-Monday gallery. There was a roar for encore.

From that point the success of the play was assured. The audience having got itself into a good temper became first fascinated, then thrilled; and when Mr. Warner enacted the incurable drunkard battling with temptation, yet ever yielding, and at last descending, as it were, to a living hell, every one felt that this was not a play merely for laughter—it was horrible to the verge of disgusting; yet its realism approached the sublime.

Those who had seen '*L'Assommoir*' at the Ambigu Theatre confessed at once that the English adapter, in eliminating three-fourths of the filth, had idealized magnificently the French author's drama; and when Mr. Gooch, the lessee, came on to tell how this version was neither a piracy nor a theft, but produced with the sanction of M. Zola, who shared in the results, there remained nothing to dim the lustre of the triumph, except the one sad fact of Mrs. Seymour's absence, and that to Charles Reade spoilt it all. At the moment he may have striven to lull his apprehensions; yet because his dear friend was lying ill he could not enjoy it. 'Drink' was infinitely his greatest success in the

metropolis, from a pecuniary point of view. Thousands came rolling in where before he had received but tens. He recouped himself for a fraction of those vast losses by theatrical speculation, which he himself set down at an almost fabulous total, for he shared the venture with Mr. Gooch, who proved a most excellent partner. But the turn of the wheel came too late. It seemed almost to mock his misery.

More than a year previous to this date,—indeed, as early as March, 1878,—we find in his diary a long account of Mrs. Seymour's ailments. "I have nearly lost poor Seymour," he writes, "by internal gout. She had a month of agony followed by long prostration. It appears to have been caused by many worries, and by applying cold water to an attack of podagra. The gout was cured thereby in a few hours, but the malady resented this and crept to the vitals. Her predecessor, Betterton, is said to have killed himself in forty-eight hours by this treatment. He was implored to play for some friend's benefit whilst labouring under gout—got rid of it with cold water, acted, and died.

“Seymour’s natural inability to eat was against her. She was exhausted by pain, and not supported by nutriment. Tried homœopathy first; then allopathy. The gout was on one occasion relieved by belladonna, administered by me, at her request—not in a large dose.

“She was attended twice a day by Quain, *who refused all fee*. Her illness showed this, at all events, what love and respect she is held in by all who know her, women especially, who love her because she is singularly free from the vices of her sex, vanity, and malicious babbling. I took her down to Brighton, but it did her little good; indeed, she had a slight relapse there. Since then she has had short attacks, but she has returned to the theatre.”

By the summer of 1879 this terrible disease, warded off only by violent medicines of the kind that cure only to kill, had gained upon her. If she had had her way it is tolerably certain that ‘Drink’ would neither have been written nor played; and it was her scepticism as regards its success that helped to damp Charles Reade’s spirits. When, moreover, the verdict went in favour of the play unanimously,

she was too ill to rejoice. Her countenance changed. The intense sufferings she underwent warned her of the approaching end. There was life in her body, but no hope.

The writer of these lines essayed to cheer her—albeit ineffectually. She begged for new-laid eggs from the country,—and these he was able to bring her,—yet when they came she could not touch them.

“She is a dying woman,” moaned Charles Reade—*in her hearing*.

That, alas, was true.

For a long time past this lady, to the outside world a Bohemian pure and simple, had been engaged in works of charity—unknown to a soul but herself. She had saved a little money; and, oddly enough, though never a church-goer, sympathized very acutely with the struggles of the inferior clergy—as they are termed, work in this world being a symptom of inferiority—of the Church of England, who were labouring among the London poor on stipends such as noblemen’s flunkies would have rejected with contempt. She had a very sharp eye of her own, and could tell accurately whether a man in a

black coat was a wolf in sheep's clothing, or genuine; and her plan was to forward small sums—all she could afford—anonymously to the latter variety of parson. Like many of her type she focussed her mind's eye on the philanthropic aspect of Christianity, and further deemed the poor gentleman, who endures in silence, more worthy of support than the howling proletarian or yelping mendicant. Perhaps she was in a measure right—albeit charity should know no class. Certainly her benevolence did her great credit, and afforded indirect evidence of a latent belief in religious principles, wherewith otherwise she had but little affinity. Feeling the sands running out, and possibly remembering, with some compunction, the uncompromising verities enforced by her saintly brother-in-law, the Minister of Kirkhope, she startled, yet gratified, Charles Reade by requesting him to bring a clergyman to her bedside.

Here, however, a difficulty presented itself *in limine*. They did not know their vicar, and the probabilities were strongly against a total stranger bearing comfort to a dying woman. At this juncture a happy thought flashed

across Charles Reade's mind. He had a slight acquaintance with the Vicar of Willesden. In him he recognized a gentleman of warm sympathies and liberal, though strictly orthodox, views. Thither he went as a suppliant.

Not in vain. Mr. Wharton was compelled, by the rule of the Church, to ask the permission of the incumbent, in whose parish Albert Gate is situate, to visit Mrs. Seymour. This being promptly and kindly given, the dying sufferer was consoled in her last moments by a gentle and earnest voice. With her Charles Reade received The Sacrament for the first time after a lapse of many years; and she passed away calmly, her last words being commendatory of those among Charles Reade's relatives who, in her judgment, loved him best.

It was an awful blow. No words that could be penned are able to describe its force and intensity. To tell the tale of the mighty agony of a majestic spirit would need the genius of an *Æschylus*, or the brain that could conceive a *Lear*. The man's mute dignity was heart-rending to witness. His pathetic eye seemed to say, "Look at a broken heart."

His brother Compton, playmate, companion, and counsellor, was at once by his side. Mr. Liston Reade hurried across from Germany. We do not exaggerate when we affirm that the gravest anxiety weighed on all at the moment as to whether he would survive the bitter ordeal of the funeral, for he was not only stunned and bruised in mind, but in body also so out of health as to render a collapse more than likely.

By the kindness of Mr. Wharton a last resting-place for Mrs. Seymour was provided at Willesden. She begged to be buried in a churchyard, and not in a cemetery—a very proper request, and quite in consonance with common-sense, inasmuch as the future of our cemeteries teems with very unpleasant possibilities. Her desire was of course law, and she lies undisturbed at Willesden.

The funeral demonstrated precisely Charles Reade's estimate of her popularity. There were at least six times as many theatrical people gathered round her grave as around that of the author himself, five years later. The whole profession seemed to be present. She was of course *one of them*, on the same plane ;

whereas, if we may say so without offence, Charles Reade towered above them, as the eternal firmament above the ephemeral butterfly. Their hearts were more with her than with him. She was their comrade, and it was well they assembled *en masse* to honour her.

The scene was painful in the extreme. Supported by the loving arm of his brother Compton, Charles Reade tottered behind the bier, his bosom heaving with sobs, his frame bent. He was almost beside himself with emotion; and had not his brother gripped him firmly, would have flung himself on the coffin, for the grave was open, and the sarcophagus of Mull granite, now shrouding it, had not been erected. The writer has performed the rites of the Church many hundred times, yet never has taken part in a ceremonial so pitiably tragical. It was curious to note how the actors and actresses, accustomed as they are to simulate mental torture, seemed to recoil from this exhibition of it in stern reality. He passed through their ranks—and they were all familiar faces—as one in a dream—rather we should say, as one expecting to die.

Death all but supervened shortly afterwards.

The action of his heart became irregular, and to such an extent that, but for the genius of Mr. Goodsall, whose incessant care exceeded all praise, it must have ceased. His brother shifted his quarters to Albert Gate, acted as his secretary and amanuensis, strove gently to distract his attention from the open wound, and, as all will testify, proved a lenitive influence. The drainage, unfortunately, of Albert Gate was in so defective a condition that he fell ill, and his place was subsequently supplied by various members of the family. The home, however, where in Mrs. Seymour's society the sufferer had passed so many days of happiness and contentment, was in itself an aggravation of his sorrow. Every chair, table, book, reminded him of his pain; and in the end he could bear the sight of these memories no more, and moved to his brother's residence between Shepherd's Bush and Acton.

"I have lost," he writes, "the one creature who thought more of my interest, health, and happiness than her own—a poor old man of sixty-five! Unable to live alone in the house where I was once so happy with her, and unable to find a companion I could endure

in her home, I have for a long time slept at my brother's house and only visited my own house for three or four hours every day. The drive in and out has, I think, been good for my health; and the society of my nieces, who are very kind, has at all events often broken my deep sense of solitude and utter desolation. Even in that house I have many paroxysms of grief, but I have also intermissions. This day I have mustered up resolution to sleep here (at Albert Gate). I am sitting in the studio, a large room, silent as the grave, though in the heart of London. The great simple fireplace she planned to heat this cold north room does its work nobly; but, ah me! ah me! Her seat by that fireplace is empty, empty for ever!

"March 16, 1880. Alone in the world this six months, after pining to a skeleton (too true!) for the loss of my darling, and two or three ineffectual attempts to live in the house where she made me happy. I come over this day from Coningham Road to try and spend a night here. My heart is like lead. I no longer ignore God, as I used. On the contrary, I pray hard, and give money to poor people, and

try to be God's servant. But, oh, it is so hard, and impalpable, and the world so full of vanity by comparison.

"Yet my only true intermissions of misery have been whilst doing a little act of good, or communing with my friend, the Rev. Charles Graham, who is *An Apostle*; and I can believe that God, pitying my tears and prayers, has given me his affectionate friendship to console me and temper the wind. Oh, to think that for five-and-twenty years I was blessed with Laura Seymour, and that now for the rest of my pilgrimage she is quite, quite gone. Not one look from her sweet eyes—not one smile—Oh, my heart! my heart! I am wretched. I have lost my love of the world. I have not acquired the love of God. And, I have no companion. My brother Compton tried to live with me and could not. The beastly drains made him so ill; he nearly died.

"My dogs, and the portrait of my lost darling—they are all I have. Ah, would to God I could add that I have my Saviour!

"I believe He is here, and pities me, but from want of faith I cannot feel His presence. Oh, God, increase my faith!

“Two great successes at the Princess’s Theatre, ‘Never too Late to Mend,’ and ‘Drink,’ have improved my fortune; but I really think have added to my grief—especially the latter, which my darling never could enjoy for pain and suffering, though she would ask for the receipts and be pleased in the intervals of her pain.

“My poor lamb has also left me all her savings—my tears stream afresh when I think of it. Every shilling of that sacred money is devoted to God and the poor, and even in that cause it is wormwood and agony to me to spend it.

“God’s will be done. I am very wretched; but, once more, God’s will be done.

“August 11, 1880. That attempt to live on in my own house failed, and I returned to Coningham Road (his brother Compton’s residence) to sleep.

“Between that date and this I visited Ipsden and Margate, where God enabled me to be of service in spiritual things to my dying brother (William). Also to St. Leonards, where my old friends the S——s received me coldly; and I soon left, feeling more than ever that

I had lost my one constant and unselfish friend.

"I am now making another attempt to live here (at Albert Gate), my fourth, or fifth. I have kept my diary more regularly than this, and written myself down the poor reptile I am in all that pertains to godliness.

"I write this in my studio. It looks north, and is always more depressing than my drawing-room. Mem.: to work in my drawing-room, until I can stand this large grotto better.

"Oct. 16, 1880. I remember that when I was a little boy everybody noticed my extraordinary helplessness. My dear sister Julia noticed it particularly at Sandgate, seeing how feebly I got off the coach, like one that expected to be lifted down. Once I fell off a coach into a man's arms, as I was getting up.

"Of late years I used to hang fire at any good or useful thing, until *she* helped and drove me. I could not put my papers to rights on the table without *her* help.

"I can't do it, now she is gone, without help. I begin, but cannot effect it. It is the same in the things of God. I wish in my weak way

to serve Him, and do good to His people. But I hang fire. I don't trouble about it. I wait till the deserving poor shall seek me—which is just what the *deserving* poor don't do. Impetuous in all tempers and desires, I am so languid in good.

“Here is all prepared for Laura Seymour's dole, yet I lack energy to go and draw the money and complete. Death, or loss of reason, will, I fear, take me postponing some good thing. Why don't I trouble in good acts, as *she* did?”

“Why? Because my heart is not with God. ‘Oh, quicken Thou me according to Thy word!’”

These sorrowful extracts reveal the writer's mind. In the first poignant ecstasy of bereavement he had leaned helplessly on the brother who had been throughout nearest and dearest to him. There he found such sympathy as was helpful—so far, at all events, as human warmth can help a broken heart. Throughout the long nights his nieces watched by his bedside, for the paroxysms he alludes to were violent and overwhelming, and would arouse the entire household. The suggestion on the

part of one who has publicly claimed the honour of Charles Reade's friendship, that he was suffering from monomania, may be dismissed as inexact if not insulting. Acute sorrow cannot be designated mania, even though it be associated with religious emotion. In evidence of this we may point to the sentence wherein the sufferer dreads lest he should lose his reason—the strain being so great. Such a fear is in itself *rational*, and proves mental balance. No madman ever yet feared that he might be going mad—indeed the insane believe firmly in their sanity. Here, as elsewhere, the gentleman in question has forgotten what is due to the memory of one with whom he is anxious to assert the tie of friendship.

It was his brother who introduced Charles Reade to the divine whom he styles an apostle. Opinions differ; and the estimate one man adopts of another depends largely on the standpoint of each. We do not expect a licensed victualler to uphold a temperance lecturer as a model of all the virtues, nor an experimental physiologist to bless the Antivivisection Society. Making every allowance

for the antagonism subsistent between an actor and a representative of Calvinism, it was hardly equitable on the part of the *soi-disant* friendly pen, which gibbeted Charles Reade as a lunatic, to malign his spiritual consoler as an *obscure* Nonconformist. The Rev. Charles Graham may not enjoy the notoriety of a player of the third, or the celebrity of a player of the first, rank, but he happens to be the recognized representative of the established Church of Scotland in London, and as such is not wholly unknown; while on the other side of that thin dividing line, the river Tweed, he is as much of a Conformist as our gracious Sovereign Lady herself. It may have been Charles Reade's weakness of intellect, but he certainly expressed himself astonished—speaking from an Oxonian point of view—at this clergyman's storehouse of learning. Mr. Graham's age, his intellect, his character, his earnest eloquence,—above all, the signal service he rendered a great and sorrowing soul,—might have shielded him from a stolid sneer; and that too in a magazine issuing from New Burlington Street. But enough. By all, except perhaps the more lubricious element

of the dramatic profession, the written encomium of the author will be held to outweigh the censure of "Temple Bar"; and, apart from Charles Reade, a Communion which boasts the foremost theologian of this age—Professor Drummond—can very well afford to ignore this type of assailant. Unable, as he puts it, after reiterated attempts, to endure either the solitude or associations of Albert Gate; and needing, over and above the unremitting attentions of Mr. Liston Reade, constant care—a task for which his nieces were by experience well qualified—being also anxious for the society occasionally of his good friend, Mr. Graham, Charles Reade proposed to his brother what may be termed an act of mutual self-denial. He had Albert Gate on his hands, but would not live there. His brother had built for himself a model residence, suited to the requirements of his family. This last was hardly spacious enough for the necessities of both brothers. The younger proposed, therefore, that they should each give up his home—take on long lease a pair of semi-detached villas, nearer London, and by removing the wall of partition between the

gardens create one large lawn. After sundry alterations this plan took effect, and the brothers moved to their two residences, *dos à dos*, but communicating by means of a verandah.

The sacrifice was all on one side; but the elder brother had the profound satisfaction of witnessing its happy results. Charles Reade was aroused to interest by the excitement of moving. A foe to paint, and a lover of varnish, he had all his doors and wainscots scraped, and displayed the grain of the wood. He bustled about, fitted up his new home with every comfort, and actually began to put on flesh. He started a menagerie of Belgian hares, which fraternized quite comfortably with Mrs. Seymour's pair of toy terriers; and the passers-by on the tram-cars wondered to behold what seemed to be a warren in a London suburb. In the summer tennis occupied a large slice of the day; and his relations, at all events, hoped he had settled down calmly to a new life—or rather that he had reverted to that of his boyhood and young manhood. Mr. Graham was his chief consolation beyond his own precincts, and within

them he seemed tranquillized by the devoted affection of his brother.

A public charge of monomania—religious monomania, it is styled, but the adjective hardly qualifies the indictment—having been preferred against Charles Reade, we deem it right to adduce evidence beyond that of ourselves, to demonstrate its falsity. Mr. Graham writes, “The statement of Mr. Charles Reade being ‘a monomaniac on the subject of religion,’ is utterly without foundation. Monomania, according to the definition of medical science, means ‘disordered or erroneous persuasions of the mind on one subject.’ I conversed with Mr. Reade more than one hundred times on the subject of religion, and never detected in him any ‘disordered or erroneous persuasion’ in relation to it. On the contrary, I have always been impressed with the soundness of his judgment on every subject within the wide range of our conversations. More than a dozen times we met at my house, and entered into conversation on religious and other questions *with medical men*, and ministers of the gospel; and all were charmed with his superior intelligence, and

with the soundness of his views, as well as the sincerity of his heart. If my esteemed friend was a monomaniac on the subject of religion, I have never met a man of sound mind upon it."

This is witness. Now for its corroboration.

"I have never been downright ill," wrote Charles Reade to Mr. Graham, "since my darling died, until Monday night last. Then my chronic cough became very violent, with headache and depression. My brother, who has kept me company in this sad home, left me; and I was not only ill, but quite alone, in a house where hitherto a loving nurse had hovered over me in sickness. This overpowered me so, that I am ashamed to say, I prayed to die.

"In sheer terror I have left home, and come to my brother for a day or two.

"Alas, I am not Christian, but Faint-heart; or rather, like Christiana, I need a Great-Heart to cling to in this bitter and complicated trial.

"Forgive the egotism which intrudes its woes upon you. Those who live for others are soon singled out and taken advantage of.

"Yours, gratefully and ashamed,

"CHARLES READE."

Again :

“Dear Mr. Graham, I was sorry not to see you on the eve of your journey ; however, I hope my good wishes caught you flying, and that you are being refreshed in body and spirit by this visit to your native country. You were certainly being overworked here, and some relief of tension necessary.

. . . . ‘Neque semper arcum
Tendit APOSTLE.’

“Your return, however, will be welcome—both to the many who, like myself, love you in private, and to the congregation of Avenue Road chapel.

“Looking forward to your return I am, my dear friend and consoler,

“Ever yours affectionately,

“CHARLES READE.”

Again—in reference to the above-mentioned move :

“Dear Mr. Graham—cough gone, and pain in my chest much abated. But this is the 14th day of close imprisonment. I am weary of inaction and confinement.

“Do you remember the character of Mr.

Weary o' the World in the 'Pilgrim's Progress'? I seem to myself to resemble him more than I do Christian, or Faithful, or Hopeful.

"We have offered Mr. B—— £120 a-year for his two houses on a long lease. Thereupon he sent his agent to ask my brother to call on him. My brother excused himself from doing that. Then Mr. B—— wrote and declined.

"Till this letter came I was beginning to think it was ordained I should leave my old abode, and all associations not worth cherishing, and begin life again—at sixty-seven—on the Uxbridge Road.

"Now I hardly know what to think.

"At the request of a lady in Melrose Gardens I sent a trifle to a poor clergyman in Wales. He has not acknowledged receipt. Should he glad to know whether he has got it. I do not like to write and ask him.

"It seems odd not to acknowledge a donation.

"Yours affectionately,

"CHARLES READE."

The above letters, written at long intervals, fail to give the smallest support to the slander

of monomania. The next will be read by some with contempt, by others with approbation ; but by all, except the most exacerbated, with respect for the writer's sincerity.

"8, Clarendon Villas, Margate.

"Dear Mr. Graham, I arrived here at seven, and found my brother (William Barrington) pale and emaciated, and by loss of teeth somewhat inarticulate. He felt my coming, which was a comfort, for the sight of the place has set my heart bleeding as freely as ever. I did propose to go to Hastings tomorrow, but I have postponed leaving this place for the following reasons: here is a dying Christian surrounded by living Christians. Yet death and eternity have never been mentioned during all this sickness." (We have reason to believe that here *he was in error*—we give his letter simply as an index of his mind, and with apologies to those whom with well-meant zeal he takes to task.) "All for want of a little courage. Now, as I earnestly hope people will talk about nothing else in my dying ears, I have taken upon me, though a very poor Christian compared with others in

this house, to break through this unhappy reticence. I have spoken to him of his death as probable. I have examined him as to his condition, and read to him a selection from the service called 'The Visitation of the Sick'; and I find him so humble, penitent, and full of faith, that I have proposed to him to take the Communion with me after preparation. His parish priest, who is zealous, will be at his bedside at four this afternoon, and so I do hope the ice will be broken.

"This will postpone my visit to St. Leonards.
With kind love to you and yours,

"Yours very sincerely,

"CHARLES READE.

"Lovely weather—sunset a hundred colours!"

The above offers a complete vindication—except to those jaundiced minds who, like dumb driven cattle, focus their eyes on the ground, and, themselves never looking upwards, decry all religious emotion as insanity, and all religious conviction as imbecility.

But enough of small slander. Suffice it, that during the most acute period, when his friends, who were eyewitnesses of such torture

as only the grandest mind could endure without lesion had only too grave cause to apprehend the loss of his reason, he was as yet a stranger to Mr. Graham! When, subsequently, he came within range of that divine's beneficent influence, his spirit by degrees calmed; and never during life was his brain more cool, more judgmatical, better tempered to endure the strain of external phenomena.

Of his great philanthropic work between the years 1879—1883, it is not for us to speak particularly. What he had inherited from Mrs. Seymour he distributed with his own hand—and much also of his own small fortune, his donations in one year amounting to the large total of £3000. Cases have been publicly cited of his delicate liberality. They could be multiplied—almost indefinitely.

On one appeal for alms—from an actor—he wrote:

“Fatal procrastination! I meant to have given this poor fellow the money he asked, but he died before I could reach him—confound it all!”

Was that *monomania*?

CHAPTER XIV.

VIA CALCANDA.

AT the close of 1881 William Barrington Reade passed away ; his eldest son, Winwood, had succumbed some six years previously to disease contracted in Ashantee ; his successor, therefore, as Squire of Ipsden, was his second son, Henry St. John Reade, successively head boy of Tonbridge, scholar of University College, Oxford, captain of the Oxford eleven, and first-class man. This gentleman, who married the grand-daughter of Dr. Vincent, Dean of Westminster, had chosen the scholastic profession, and galvanized the Grocers Company's group of schools at Oundle, from a paltry handful of thirty boys, to a big public school nearly ten times that number. On attaining

the dignity of Squire he, however, amidst loud regrets, resigned his post of pedagogue, and organized a huge housewarming at Ipsden.

Thirty-two descendants of venerable John Reade met on that happy occasion. Of this company Charles Reade was, of course, the cynosure. Ancient rustics, who retained vivid recollections of "Master Chawse," came to pay their respects to the silver-bearded author. There was a cricket match improvised, and other homely festivities; while, to tell the boys and girls something of their origin, the drawing-room tables were covered with the records of the Reades of a remote past. There, in black letter, a terra incognita to the eyes of all but the instructed, were the title-deeds of the manors conveyed by one Andlett of Abingdon, reputed to be King Hal's barber, to William Reade of Beedon. Three-hundred-and-fifty years had passed since then, with many vicissitudes for the race. There, too, was the inventory of Catherine Reade's furniture, when in the reign of Edward VI. she brought her husband, a certain Mr. Thomas Vachell, of papistical proclivities, to live at Ipsden. There were the letters of the cavalier Edward when locked

up in Oxford Castle for debt, and much of strange interest, though of later date.

"Alas," sighed the successful author, as he perused these records, "that I should have done so little for the family!"

The said family happens to be one of the very few remaining which held a territorial position antecedently to the Wars of the Roses. Mr. Evelyn Shirley omitted it from his catalogue—the murderous maniac, who represented the senior branch, having, just before the publication of the said book, aliened Beedon, which had been in the possession of the family for more than five centuries, and with that the ruins of Barton Court, a hallowed memorial of the bravery of Sir Compton Reade. Mr. Shirley, however—although of course he would not include Ipsden in his list, it having been purchased a few years after the arbitrary chronological limit he fixed—omitted to take into account the estate at Taynton, which at the moment remained the property of Sir John Chandos Reade, and had been in the family *before* the reign of Henry VI. There was cause enough for Charles Reade's deep-heaved sigh. Beedon had gone to a banker,

and Dunstewe, renamed—in Charles II.'s time, by Sir John Reade of Brocket—Barton, in honour of the greater Barton which lay in ruins, to a brewer. Brocket had passed to the descendants of Sir John Brocket's land-agent; and Shipton, the Royal residence, with the "ancient inheritance of Taynton," by the will of the said homicidal, Sir John Chandos, to his butler. Boarstal was the property of strangers, and thus, of all the manors, Ipsden alone remained. Little by little, in the lapse of centuries the race, once so opulent and powerful, had been dwindling into insignificance; no marvel, therefore, Charles Reade regretted that, like his father, he had avoided a political career, and thereby lost the chance of rehabilitating the old name.

It was a bright gathering for the children, yet to the seniors sorrowful. At the open doors of the old house there seemed to enter familiar faces and forms—the venerable Squire and his courtly wife; sister Ellinor; young Allen Gardiner, Julia's handsome son; Anna, doomed as Mrs. R. A. J. Drummond, to face the fire of the mutineers in India. The shadow of sorrow seemed almost to pass over the scene

in anticipation, for the reign of Henry St. John Reade at Ipsden was destined to be but brief, and the sounds of rejoicing but the prelude of the death wail, to be heard only too soon.

It was now three summers since the decease of Mrs. Seymour had, as it were, dashed the pen from Charles Reade's hand. Messrs. Scribner, through Mr. Warne, offered him £4000 for a novel,—and his nephew pressed him to write fiction in a serious vein,—but the answer was, "Why should I?" The theatrical people came buzzing about him with the design of inveigling him in some speculation, but to them he was deaf. He had, as he phrased it to Mr. Graham, *another Master*, and his self-imposed task of almoner-general cheered and invigorated him. It is a fact, that as he played tennis on the lawn at Ipsden, every one could but note how, to all appearance lastingly, he had recovered from the effects of that blow which had been all but fatal. His face had filled out. He was no longer lean, but well clothed with adipose tissue. His spirits had revived. He enlivened the table with racy anecdotes. Three years had given him a measure of rejuvenescence.

Had he continued thus, it is not too much to affirm, he would have been with us to-day. As it fell out, the new orb of existence waxed only to wane.

He allowed himself, contrary to his better judgment, to be over-persuaded into a dramatic collaboration, which eventually led up to a theatrical speculation. It is superfluous to hazard a criticism of the drama called 'Love and Money,' produced at The Adelphi Theatre; inasmuch as whatever credit belongs to the play must be set down to the score of Mr. Pettit. Suffice it, that the excitement of the stage, its surroundings and associations, injured irrecoverably a delicate constitution. He became irritable and restless. Mr. Graham testifies that he was unhappy, if not remorseful; for although he always stoutly maintained that the drama ought to exercise a regenerating influence on society, and tend to the mental and moral exaltation of man, he could, when in the mood, be none the less severe on the environment of playhouses and their "lubricity," as he has emphatically termed it in his guard-book. For him the theatre possessed the quality of strong, of overpowering, magic. It

was cruel kindness to apply that wand in order to drag him against his conscience whither he would not. However, so it was to be.

From a pecuniary point of view he gained nothing, even when the receipts of the novel, based on the drama, are added to the sums he received—less loss—by its representations in England and America. The sum paid him by Messrs. Tillotson, of Bolton, for the issue of 'Love and Money'* in serial form did not,

* Afterwards issued both in America for Messrs. Harper's 'Bazaar,' and in 'Temple Bar' under the title, 'A Perilous Secret.' Mr. W. F. Tillotson, who was approached originally by Charles Reade's nephew in 1875, in reference to 'The Woman Hater,' endeavoured for many years to persuade him to write for his syndicate. In reply to one, among many overtures, in May, 1878, Charles Reade wrote: "Dear Sir, I am at home every morning till two, and very happy to talk to you about anything but novels. The public is an ass, and does not understand mine. So I am not in a humour to waste time, and labour, and skill." Eventually Mr. Tillotson was equally surprised and gratified by Charles Reade offering him the serial user of 'Love and Money,' provided terms could be arranged—as actually occurred—with Messrs. Harper and Brothers for simultaneous publication in America. It was a singular coincidence that the first, and last, novel of Charles Reade should have been published in this country by the eminent firm of R. Bentley and Son, of New Burlington Street.

by any means, cover his disbursements to a single actress. It may be a hard reflection, but it is a true one, that this Barmecidal reversion to the theatre cost him money, labour, time, temper, peace of mind, health, and life itself.

Yet, in spite of so ill-advised an attempt to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds, and certain outspoken remonstrances from his brother Compton as to the folly of all this, his mind never faltered in its loyalty to those who were true to him. He may have neglected Mr. Graham's advice, yet his love for that sterling friend remained unshaken. He gave reiterated assurances of his deep affection for those near relatives who had devoted themselves to him. Soon, too, his old ailments returned with redoubled vehemence, and he needed sorely all their solicitude. The wracking cough became his constant companion. He fell away to a skeleton. Food seemed poison. There was at times a look of death visible on his face—albeit his spirits varied, and a niece remarked, with simple truth, "Uncle Charles is so very young." Elasticity of spirits, however, was neutralized by spells

of melancholy, coupled with a strange restlessness. He had no idea that he was dying, yet hardly cared for life. When the writer wished him happy returns of his birthday, he painfully startled his well-wisher with, "Belay that, my boy!" It was a pitiable change, more especially to those who knew only too well what had been the cause.

Towards the close of 1883 he resolved to escape the London fog—his enemy, though by no means the worst one he had—and to that end roamed abroad, attended only by a secretary. It was the wish of his family that one of their number should accompany him, but he preferred solitude. At first the change did him good, and he wrote to his nephew—the writer—then resident at Elton Rectory, to invite himself during the ensuing spring, begging especially for some trout-fishing. Soon, however, the dark tide began to roll, and he who drifted on its billows, to realize the nearness of the bourne whereunto he was hastening.

Under date Cannes, Jan. 1, 1884, he writes thus :

"In March, 1883, I nearly died of bronchitis,

which with me is chronic, and has paroxysms. For the first time was unable to eat.

“When I got about again, little spasms came on in stomach or bowels about one o’clock. I stopped them at first by eating a little.

“But, by-and-by, they came on at all hours and were painful. I lost flesh and appetite, and took to sipping milk to stop them. A month or two more and they became frequent and tormenting.

“Too soon I found myself with no appetite for meat, and drinking milk instead of tea. After several months of it, wasted to a skeleton, I left England. Journeys made me worse, and when I reached Cannes early in December, I was in agonies day and night. A paroxysm of bronchitis fell on me, and I felt myself in danger. But Providence sent me a good friend, though a humble one, in the *femme de chambre*. I cut down the fever that hitherto accompanied my cough, and, weakened as I was by pain, I pulled through. She administered hot linseed plasters for my agony.

“A fortnight ago I gave up meat altogether, and my torments began to retire directly. Now I often have a day without a pang.

“Present diet:—8 a.m., tea, nearly all milk, two poached eggs. Brandt’s jelly or else cream. About 11, a raw egg and milk. At 1, pea-soup, strong of the meat. About 3, milk. 5, strong soup—lentils. 7, powdered biscuits and lots of cream. At night, whenever I wake, raw egg and milk. I often eat eight raw eggs in the twenty-four hours. Weak in body, and rather weak and desultory in mind, bringing up a good deal of mucus, sometimes cough, but no violent pains. Three weeks ago I thought I had a schirrus, a something inside me, and must die. Now I think I shall live, though of course I am always in danger of bronchitis.

“Diet this day, Jan. 2. At 8, poached eggs, cream, hot milk. At 11, eggs and milk. 1, pea-soup. 3, a glass of milk hot from the cow set me coughing directly. At 4, a little powdered biscuit and cream. At 5, strong soup with flour of lentils. At 7, stewed plums and cream. Chilly and inclined to cough. Result. Pain in chest at night, but slept from 9 till 5. After dressing rather brisk, walked in corridor. If I can walk, it will be a new era.

“Jan. 3. At 8, poached eggs, cream, hot milk, little tea.

“Feb. 6, 1884. Either the climate of Cannes or the open carriages in which the hot sun tempts me to ride, have made my emphysema and chronic bronchitis twice as bad as they were in England. Even without exertion I pant for breath. Sometimes I pant in bed.

“This day, after long threatening to leave the beguiling sea-side, I have moved to the Hôtel Richemont. Soup a failure—a mere *consommé*, although the mistress, an obliging Englishwoman, promised me faithfully an English soup. I have to tell her to make the cook stew the meat before she boils it, so to-morrow we shall see. Examined this day by Dr. Frank. He finds considerable induration of the lower liver, but without any pronounced lump—great emphysema, but the bronchial tubes clear. The stomach and intestines seriously disordered.

“What is all this but a general breaking up of the system? He sees no help or alleviation but the right diet, air, and sleep.

“This first day of Richemont my secretary has prevailed on me to walk to the dairy, where I buy my milk. He carried a chair, into which I sank several times, coming and going. I did

not quite get to the dairy. On the way I found a cottage with three female goats. I sat at the cottage door in the sun and drank nearly two half-pints of warm goats' milk. It seemed to agree with me. God willing, I will do this every day that the weather is fine!"

These extracts tell, with no further description, the rapid descent. What improvement there seemed to be may be termed illusory. Each bulletin grew more despondent. He signed letters only, dictating them to his secretary, who appears to have been very attentive and sympathetic. There could have been little doubt, in his own mind, that the end was approaching.

In the midst of this intermittent anguish, moreover, an event occurred which filled him with horror and apprehension.

His nephew Henry, the bright and genial Squire, who had but just settled down with his young wife and family in the dear old home at Ipsden, came up to London to consult not one doctor, but several. Those who, in the later summer of 1882, had seen him play cricket with the activity and strength of an undergraduate, to the admiration of all who

saw it, must have deemed it incredible that this hale, vigorous man, not burdened with superfluous flesh, a stranger to vice of every description—indeed a model scholar and gentleman—should be suddenly cast for death.

Yet so it was. To spare his fond wife, who was in ignorance of the imminent danger, he asked to be allowed to occupy his Uncle Charles's empty house. Thither to him flocked the doctors, but their art was unavailing. With rare fortitude he laid himself down on his uncle's bed to die, writing in pencil the tenderest and sweetest farewells to all he cared for. He suffered, as strong men must, who are cut down in their prime; but the fatal internal disease did its work rapidly. It seemed but a few days from the time when he lay down on Charles Reade's bed, and his passing away.

Of all the Reades who, since 1539, had enjoyed the Ipsden estate, his tenure was the shortest, two years and two months only.

So tragic an occurrence would have filled a soul of the coarsest fibre with compassion and grief. Here was a man of middle age whose career had been one continuous, unbroken success; he had inherited a position,

not indeed of great opulence, but of honour. The lines had fallen to him in a pleasant place, for Ipsden is the Eden of England. Yet, as it were in a few short hours, this vision of happiness and beauty ended. No single circumstance could have affected the mind of Charles Reade more acutely. The echoes of the passing bell wafted across the sea must have sounded like notes of warning. From that moment his desire was intense to return home. Debility deferred his journey more than once; and it was not until the horror of dying in a foreign land overpowered him that he mustered resolution to move homewards.

There can be little doubt that the dietary he selected at Cannes was utterly wrong. The liver was the seat of all his maladies; and for a man of mature years, afflicted with a diseased liver, to live on eggs and cream, seems, indeed, infatuation. It came to this, that everything he swallowed both poisoned and caused him internal pain. Weakness of an alarming character supervened, aggravated by the cruel cough. It seemed a problem whether he could reach home alive.

At last his nieces received a telegram

summoning them to Boulogne. They had barely recovered from the labour and anxiety of attending on poor Henry St. John Reade's death-bed; but at once hastened across the Channel to find their beloved uncle mentally prostrate, and in a pitiable condition.

He was very deeply attached to them, and their presence for the nonce revived him. By their assistance the journey to Uxbridge Road was painfully accomplished; but there was no hope—death had stamped its mark on his face.

"I am come home to die," was his feeble whisper.

That was the obvious fact; but his eagerness to reach Shepherd's Bush was caused by a wish he had repeatedly expressed, *viz.* that he might pass away surrounded by the prayers of his own flesh and blood. There had been a time in his life when his relations with his family were by no means of the most cordial nature. For that, with a magnanimity peculiarly his own, he openly blamed himself, and for many years sought to make amends by acts of kindness and generosity. It was but natural, therefore, that he should crave at the last for the sympathy he valued most; none the less

a terrible ordeal, however, was that journey from Boulogne. His nieces feared he would die in the railway-carriage.

He expressed himself very anxious also for a parting interview with the gentle and faithful divine who had been his mainstay during the darkest hours of his life. To his bedside came, by his urgent request, Mr. Graham, and the confidences then exchanged left no doubt as to the state of his mind. He had been preparing for the dread change, and in view thereof had composed his own epitaph—to remain as a confession of the belief he cherished so ardently.

The intelligence of his arrival and critical state aroused universal interest; telegrams rolled in from all parts—not excepting the United States. The leading literary and theatrical celebrities thronged his portals; but by the strict injunctions of the medical men in attendance were, reluctantly, denied admission. The sufferer himself implored that his last hours should be undisturbed; and when a quondam theatrical friend insisted on a moment, just to press his hand, he may not have recognized him, or may have been

unwilling to do so. His mind remained fairly unclouded, and in the presence of Mr. Graham he roused himself to join in that friend's commendatory prayer.

The naturally virile constitution of the once muscular man did not, as was expected, give way at once. In weakness and suffering he lingered on, and that for many days beyond the doctors' expectations. The bright light flickered, and flickered; now became obscured, only to burst forth again; now seemed to vanish altogether. Nature struggled bravely, and more than one published bulletin in the daily papers held out false hopes. Even the doctors allowed themselves to be deceived. His brother Compton alone grasped the terrible truth, and watched for the end.

It came—and, by one of those strange coincidences which appeal so forcibly to souls whose faith shines brightest—on the afternoon of GOOD FRIDAY.

We need hardly point the symbolism.
Memor esto servi Tui!

Under a large plain sarcophagus, of Mull granite, in the south-eastern angle of Willesden churchyard, by the side of Mrs. Seymour,

whose virtues he had extolled in a highly eulogistic epitaph, Charles Reade reposes. It will be for others to say what his life and labour shall be valued at in the time to come. To us he was endeared, not merely by brain, but by heart; not solely because he was great, but because he was good also. He left his faults behind him to be forgotten. His virtues remain, and shine with increasing lustre. With all the reverence due to a departed soul we append his profession of the faith that was in him, a document written with a dying hand, yet one whose pulses were warmed by high hope :

HERE LIE,
BY THE SIDE OF HIS BELOVED FRIEND,
THE MORTAL REMAINS OF
CHARLES READE,
DRAMATIST, NOVELIST, JOURNALIST.

His last words to mankind are on this stone.

“I hope for a resurrection—not from any power in nature, but from the will of the Lord God Omnipotent, who made nature and me. He created man out of nothing; which nature could not. He can restore man from the dust, which nature cannot.

“And I hope for holiness and happiness in a future life—not for anything I have said or done in this body, but from the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ.

“He has promised His intercession to all who seek it, and He will not break his word; that intercession once granted cannot be rejected; for He is God, and His merits infinite; a man’s sins are but human and finite.

“‘Him that cometh unto Me I will in nowise cast out.’ If any man sin, we have an Advocate with The Father, Jesus Christ, the Righteous; and He is the propitiation for our sins.—AMEN.”

APPENDIX.

CHARLES READE literally writhed under the lash of the Rev. Dr. Stanton's aspersions in the American press, destined only too soon to be reprinted in England. Nothing in the whole course of his career stung him so cruelly to the quick as did this bogus psychography of himself perpetrated by a clerical journalist. It was not petty pride. He never blamed his friend Mr. Graham, who in truth was as much the victim of betrayed confidence as he himself was. But he felt bitterly the practical lampoon which upheld one, who had been a harmless Bohemian all through, in the light of a saint. Not condescending to respond to a sham eulogium which really amounted to an impudent libel, he could scarcely sit still under some of the accusations hurled with such cool recklessness at himself and Mrs. Seymour. Hence he sent for a warm friend and brother in art, Mr. Joseph Hatton ; and that gentleman, who at the moment had all but arranged to collaborate with him in a new branch of dramatic narration, *viz.* fiction founded on a sacred subject—an idea which fell through solely on account of Charles Reade's health—responded at once to the call. He found the injured man seated with Mrs. Seymour's portrait in his hand, overpowered by emotion, indeed bathed in tears, yet anxious

to tell the truth concerning his most cherished convictions, to prove by chapter and verse those numerous professions of belief which occur in all or nearly all his works. Mr. Hatton, needless to add, offered him the true sympathy of an artist and a man of the world—being alike pained at the spectacle of grief, and unable to conceal the scorn and righteous indignation that stirred his breast. After some discussion, it was arranged that Charles Reade should tell his own unvarnished tale in a letter to Mr. Hatton, which the latter would communicate to the American press, with his own comments. Yet even then the true gentleman, with a chivalry all his own, made a distinct stipulation that Dr. Stanton should be handled temperately.

"I have often," writes Mr. Joseph Hatton, "thought of describing that memorable day when we discussed the affair—his gentleness, his tenderness, his desire that in handling the subject I should not use 'too strong words.'"

This communication, which enlightened the trans-Atlantic public, has never been reproduced in this country, and we deem it alike due to Charles Reade, and courteous to his generous champion, Mr. Joseph Hatton, to lay it before the readers of this Memoir. It is entitled "CHARLES READE'S FAITH," and addressed to 'THE NEW YORK TIMES.'

"An article headed 'THE CONVERSION OF CHARLES READE' is going the round of the journals.

"The writer, Dr. Stanton, has not read Charles Reade's works, nor consulted any educated person as to their character; yet he describes his religious opinions, as well as his manners and personal appearance, and gives his own view of certain facts confided to him by the Rev. Charles Graham, with a warning that Mr. Reade shrank from newsmongers' notoriety. The worst of these violations of private intercourse is, that the purveyor of gossip on such

terms dares not submit his copy for correction to those whose confidence he has betrayed, and so indelicacy breeds inaccuracy.

"I called upon Mr. Reade the other day, and found him deeply grieved that the most sacred feelings of his heart should have been wormed out of his spiritual adviser in the name of religion, and adulterated for the purposes of trade; but though much distressed at some of Dr. Stanton's figments, he was very desirous not to disturb the general impression that he is weaned from the world, and humbly desires to serve God. This has kept him silent, but he said he would write me a letter and then leave the matter in my hands. I have since received the letter in question :

" *No. 19, Albert Gate,*
June 14.

"MY DEAR HATTON,

"I shall indeed be grateful if you will assist me to correct just two of Dr. Stanton's errors that wound me cruelly, and can edify nobody.

"*First*—That during the lifetime of Mrs. Seymour I held Rationalistic views, and perverted my darling friend's mind with them; and this was, as he understands, the cause of my remorse after her death.

"*Second*—That "in spite of this, Mr. Graham was able to assure me she did not die without Christian hope."

"1. I was instructed in the Christian verities from my cradle by my dear mother, who was a saint and a deeply-read theologian. I have declared my faith—in my books—many times, and, in face of that public declaration, Dr. Stanton's statement is really too unscrupulous in itself, and the base of another calumny; for my deceased friend, though a less instructed, was a firm believer. She acted the Gospel more than she talked it; but she could speak too. I remember once, when some sceptical opinions were mooted before her, she said, with a certain majesty and

power she could command on uncommon occasions, "AND WHAT CAN THEY GIVE THE WORLD TO MAKE UP FOR THE GLORIOUS HOPE THEY WOULD ROB IT OF!"

"These were her words to the letter.

"2. Mrs. Seymour and I were old people, you know. During the nineteen years I lived in the same house with her she led an innocent life, a self-denying life, and a singularly charitable life. In the exercise of this grace there was scarcely a Scriptural precept she did not fulfil to the letter. She was merciful to all God's creatures; she took the stranger into her house for months; she cared for the orphan; she visited and nursed the sick; she comforted the afflicted in mind; she relieved the poor in various classes of life, constantly hiding her bounty from others, and sometimes from its very objects. Those charities are still continued out of her funds, and through the influence of her example.

"God drew her nearer to Him by five months of acute suffering. She bore her agonies (from cancer of the liver) with meek resignation, and sorrow for me, who was to lose her, but none for herself.

"Several days before her death she made a distinct declaration of her faith, *viz.* that she relied not on her good and charitable works, but only on the merits of her Redeemer. Three days before her death she partook of the Holy Communion with fervent responses and such an expression of pious rapture as I never saw on any human face before.

"My grief for her is selfish. You know what I have lost—a peerless creature, wise, just, and full of genius, yet devoted to me. She alone sustained me in the hard battle of my life, and now, old and broken, I must totter on without her, sick, sad, and lonely.

"My remorse is for this. I had lived entirely for the world, and so disquieted her with my cares, instead of

leading her on the path of peace, and robbed God of a saint, though not of a believer. I did also afflict myself with doubts of her eternal welfare, but where there is great affection there is always great solicitude. Bereaved Christians torment themselves with this tender anxiety more than bereaved Rationalists do. Mr. C. Graham, when he knew the particulars of her life and death, never shared my anxieties. He removed them entirely. That living evangelist showed me my doubts were in reality doubts of God's goodness and wisdom, and of His special promises. But the words Mr. Stanton has put into his mouth deny the faith and ignore the charity of her whole life, and cast negative hope, which is positive doubt, upon her condition at her death.

“‘Christian parents who have lost their young, and all who have cherished a Christian love and buried its object, will surely sympathize with my bleeding heart, and aid me to correct these cruel surmises of brutal gossip.

“‘For the reasons I gave you, do not object to minor inaccuracies; but kindly make it understood that I do not in my own person endorse any man's religious animosities. It would ill become *me* to asperse the Church of England or any other community that has bred holy men, whose shoes I am not worthy to tie. I am, my dear Hatton,

‘Yours sincerely,

‘CHARLES READE.’

“The public will miss in the above singularly touching letter the pungent philippics of this master of English invective. Under the inspiration of the great author's gentler mood, I suppose I ought not even to try and supply their place; yet it seems to me that Dr. Stanton has been guilty of an outrage not only upon his own sacred calling, but upon the profession of journalism. ‘Interviewing’

has become an established institution of the press on both sides of the Atlantic; but it is conducted openly, and always with the consent of the person whose views are sought for publication. Dr. Stanton imports a vicious feature into the collection of news and opinions when he plays the rôle of a detective officer, and uses his intimacy with a clerical brother to prey upon the secret workings of another man's heart, to proclaim to the world his private thoughts and hopes and feelings; and, worst of all, to distort and misinterpret them at last. If Dr. Stanton had been a trained journalist instead of a cleric scribbler, he would not have failed—at least to describe accurately what he saw and heard; and a long experience of journalism enables me to say that the most daring interviewer would have asked permission or guidance from the person most interested before converting that person's private griefs and sorrows into newspaper 'copy.'

"One cannot read the cold-blooded work of the Rev. Dr. Stanton without feeling that under the cloak of religious mission he has done a wicked and cruel wrong. Nor has he gone astray unwittingly. Warned that Mr. Reade was sensitive as to anything being said in the papers about his conversations with Mr. Graham, he nevertheless 'works up' into a newspaper article all he has heard in Mr. Graham's family circle. This not being quite strong enough for a genuine sensational letter, he evolves from his own inner consciousness the idea that Mr. Reade has been 'converted' from Rationalism to Christianity. Nothing could be more false, not even Dr. Stanton's analysis of Charles Reade's grief. Those who have any knowledge of English classics need not be reminded of the broad, practical Christianity which pervades the writings of Charles Reade, whom Dr. Stanton evidently heard of for the first time the other day. All his works bear witness against this charge of Rationalism

'Peg Woffington,' 'Christie Johnstone,' 'Put Yourself in His Place,' 'The Cloister and the Hearth,'—where are we to find nobler lessons of life or a more refreshing Christianity than in these models of masculine fancy and sterling Anglo-Saxon literature? Taking up at random the last-mentioned work, I came upon one of the most heartfelt interpretations of religious faith and fervour in all the range of fiction :

““For ever!” he cried aloud with sudden ardour; “Christians live ‘for ever,’ and love ‘for ever,’ but they do not part ‘for ever.’ They part as part the earth and sun, to meet more brightly in a little while. You and I part here for life; and what is our life? One line in the great story of the Church, whose son and daughter we are; one handful in the sand of time, one drop in the ocean of ‘for ever.’ Adieu for the little moment called ‘a life.’ We part in trouble; we shall meet in peace. We part creatures of clay; we shall meet immortal spirits. We part in a world of sin and sorrow; we shall meet where all is purity and love divine; where no ill passions are, but Christ is, and His saints around Him clad in white. There in the turning of an hour-glass, in the breaking of a bubble, in the passing of a cloud, she, and thou, and I shall meet again, and sit at the feet of angels, apostles, and saints and archangels, and apostles and saints, and beam like them with joy unspeakable, in the light of the shadow of God upon His throne, for ever, and ever, and ever.””

“I know that the churches put faith above works. That is their business. Christ taught the Gospel of works, the blessing of doing good. Fifteen years ago I met Charles Reade for the first time. I had long known and admired him through his books. Since then I have known him, as all his friends have, as a generous, liberal, warm-hearted Christian gentleman.

"As for poor dead Mrs. Seymour, I feel inclined quote against the reverend reporter of the 'Independent' the protest of Laertes at the grave of Ophelia, which, with the change of one word, admirably fits the situation :

'I tell thee, churlish priest,
A ministering angel shall our sister be
When thou liest howling.'

"JOSEPH HATTON

Garrick Club, London.

June 17, 1880.

THE END.

11, *HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN, W.C.*

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